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DREAM WORLD

STORIES OF INCREDIBLE POWERS

FEBRUARY 35¢



WAYS TO GET A GAL. . . A Brand New Story By P. G. Wodehouse

THE MAN WITH X-RAY EYES—All Secrets Were Revealed To Him

A BUCKETFUL OF DIAMONDS — Vaults Were Poper To His Touch

SEX, LOVE, AND MR. OWEN. . . . By Thorne Smith, Creator of TOPPER

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DREAM WORLD

FEBRUARY 1957 VOL. 1 NO. 1

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DREAM WORLD, Vol. 1, No. 1, February 1957, is published bi-monthly by Ziff-Davis Publishing Company, William B. Ziff, Chairman of the Board (1945-1953), at 64 E. Lake St., Chicago 1, Illinois. Application for second-class mailing privileges is pending at Chicago, Ill. Subscription rates: U. S. and possessions and Canada \$4.00 for 12 issues; Pan American Union Countries \$4.50; all other foreign countries \$5.00.

WINDFALLS . . .

Actually, the expression "windfall" is of a rather sober origin: In medieval days, finding firewood was quite a problem for the lower classes. By royal edict, commoners were forbidden to cut down trees, and when the wind would knock down a few branches, it was an extraordinary stroke of good luck—a WINDFALL.

But now let us consider some windfalls of recent vintage: Workmen digging a foundation for a Sealy, Texas, man's new garage uncovered a half-gallon jar containing \$322 in gold and silver coins dated from 1844 to 1902.

Edward Chaplin, who invested two shillings, buying an old locked box at an auction sale in Loughborough, England, made a 100-pound profit. There was a credit note for 71 pounds in the box, with interest amounting to 29 pounds.

While playing in a smokehouse at her home, a 6-year-old Elkin, N. C. girl saw a mouse run into a hole in one of the logs, gouged at the hole, and uncovered a small tobacco sack containing \$160 in old U. S. currency.

Hunting for a ball with a flashlight in a Cleveland sewer basin, two teenagers found some fifty-six \$20-gold pieces, four of which they later sold to a collector for \$144.

Cleaning up debris left by safe crackers who robbed him of \$2,000, a Wakefield, Mass., man found among scattered papers a forgotten insurance policy covering the theft.

A Shiloh, Ga., youngster grabbed at a cricket in the grass. He didn't catch it, but instead scooped up a quarter.

Someone robbed Victor Martin, of Barston, England, of his wallet, which fortunately was empty. A week later, Martin found the wallet abandoned on a street. It contained \$64.40.

An Air Force sergeant stationed at Hickman Field, Hawaii, smartly saluted nine lieutenants who passed him in a group, and received a sawbuck from each one of them. They were newly-commissioned officers who were honoring an old tradition to reward the enlisted man who first rendered them a salute.

DREAM WORLD

FEBRUARY 1957

Volume 1 Number 1

ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY
William B. Ziff (1898-1953) Founder
Editorial and Executive Offices
366 Madison Avenue
New York 17, New York

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CONTENTS

LEGS ON OLYMPUS	
By Adam Chase.....	6
WAYS TO GET A GAL	
By P. G. Wadehouse.....	24
THE DEVIL NEVER WAITS	
By Randall Garrett.....	35
SEX, LOVE AND MR. OWEN	
By Thorne Smith.....	46
TIME OUT	
By Darius John Granger.....	57
THE MAN WITH THE X-RAY EYES	
By Leonard G. Spencer.....	70
A BUCKETFUL OF DIAMONDS	
By Harlan Ellison.....	103
OSWALD'S WILLING WOMEN	
By Bill Majeski.....	115

FEATURES

WINDFALLS...	
By Paul Steiner.....	3
A STRANGE LADY CALLED LUCK	
By Villiers Gerson.....	123



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*"An ape, a bear, a stallion,
A land beyond the stars.*

*A virgin's feast, a raging beast,
A prison without bars."*

The fate of a planet hung
upon the correct decipher-
ing of this mystic message.



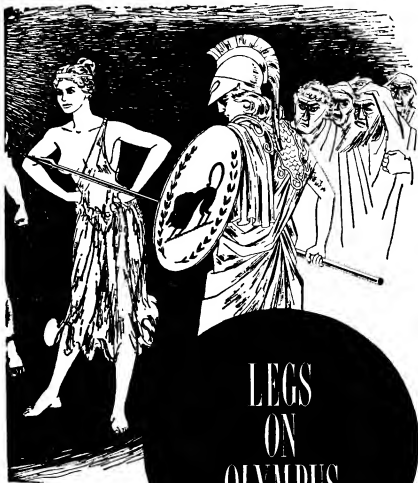
One person was entrusted
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The girls on Olympus didn't have any more than those in



LEGS ON OLYMPUS

Atlantic City, but what they had was apparently more available.

LEGS ON OLYMPUS

By ADAM CHASE

ABNER PARIS returned to his Atlantic City hotel room with visions of female busts, waists and hips. He couldn't help the visions: as youngest judge in the current big beauty contest on Steel Pier he had spent the whole afternoon scuttling about among the contestants with a tape measure and a headful of happy if frustrated ideas. But Ab Paris' feelings were something like those of a man who'd been on the point of dying of thirst when a tidal wave suddenly inundated him. In short, he had seen too many beautiful women in too many scanty bathing suits for one afternoon.

What he wanted most of all was a nice stag—and possibly solitary—evening. He opened his hotel room door gratefully and saw himself reflected in the bedroom mirror as he entered and shut the door behind him. He was in his late twenties and at the moment looked furtive. There was always the possibility of publicity agents and parents trying to visit him—against contest regulations—after hours.

Should nudity be a source of embarrassment to a beautiful girl? It certainly wasn't to the walking dream who came to Abner's room to tell him he could be of great service to her. Haw? By settling a dispute of long standing among a group of the most gorgeous females who ever paraded before male eyes. One of these chicks was named Aphrodite and was responsible for the word, *aphradisiac*. And what does it mean? If you're not positive be sure to look it up in the dictionary.

"Why, hello there!" said a voice.

Ab jumped. His image in the mirror jumped. The image behind his image in the mirror jumped. And jiggled.

She had been standing behind the door. Perhaps, Ab thought, she was one of the contestants. If so, she was not wearing the standard contest bathing suit now. In the dim light Ab was not sure at first what she was wearing. Then his eyes grew accustomed to

the light. Maybe it was a flesh-colored bathing suit, he told himself. Maybe it was tights like the high-wire performers wear. He squinted. His eyes went big. It was absolutely nothing but a few goose pimples because the hotel room's air-conditioning had been turned on.

At any other time Ab Paris probably could not have constrained himself. She was a breath-takingly lovely girl from the cloud of silver-blond hair falling to her bare shoulders down the length of her tawny body to the tips of her manicured toes. But now Ab, like a man drowning, did not want a drink.

"Why," he said, "be subtle? Why don't you just throw back the bedspread and jump in?"

She stood with hands on hips and looked at the image of Ab in the mirror looking at her image. She was not at all modest or shy about her nakedness. And, Ab thought with almost astonishing objectivity based on his hours at Steel Pier, she had a right to be proud of her attributes.

She said: "I didn't come here for an escapade. I'm sorry if you got the wrong idea." She said it very straight-faced.

"What do you expect, dressed like that?" Ab asked, going to the room's one easy chair and sitting down. Maybe he was imagining things. Maybe it was the pulchritudinous equivalent of the DT's. Maybe she would go away. "I mean," he added, "undressed like that."

"It's summer, isn't it?" the girl said. "Although there's a cold wind in this room. In fact, it's unusually cold."

"It's the air-conditioning," said Ab.

"I think it's a silly idea. If you took off your clothing—what an incredible garment, incidentally!—you'd be as cool as I am without your air-whatyousaid."

"Look," Ab said, not doing so himself. "You must have come here for something. Like giving me the big pitch for your sister or friend or someone entered in the beauty contest. Well, let me tell you this, baby, it won't work. In fact, if I find out who you represent, I'm liable to have her disqualified tomorrow."

The girl smiled and walked over to Ab's chair. She leaned down over him. He shut his eyes tight on behalf of judicial objectivity and, despite the air-conditioning, began to sweat on behalf of Abner Paris. He could smell her per-

fume, like apple blossoms and musk.

"As a matter of fact," she said, "I am here about the contest."

"Ah! Now it comes out," said Ab.

"And brother, are we ever having a hard time on Mount Ida."

"On which?" Ab asked. "You mean Steel Pier, don't you?"

"I don't know about stealing any pears. I said we're having a rough time in the beauty contest on Mount Ida. We wanted a mortal to help us. I found you."

Ab opened his eyes slowly. She did not seem to be going away. That much was obvious. He remembered the pre-contest ballyhoo dreamed up by some eager publicity men, tracing the history of beauty contests back to the most fabulous beauty contest of all, held by the ancient Greek gods, at a place called Mount Ida. Well now, he thought, I've been taken. Taken by the boys back home on the newspaper staff. But did they actually think sophisticated Abner Paris, Broadway and Hollywood columnist, would fall for a stunt like that.

"Oh, I get it," Ab said. "Naturally you would pick

me. My name's Paris, isn't it?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," the girl protested. "You see, we have these goddesses. Three of 'em, drat the luck. Hera, Athena and Aphrodite by name, and . . ."

"All right, come off of it," Ab said, "and put your clothes back on and we'll go downstairs and I'll buy you a drink. A gag's a gag, baby, but don't you think you've taken it far enough?"

"I told you, in this weather I don't wear any clothes. And I haven't gagged anybody. I came here because you were selected as the mortal to judge our celestial beauty contest. Ready to go?"

Ab frowned. He could either go along with the joke or throw her out bodily. He looked at her. If he got started throwing her out bodily he would probably wind up doing something entirely different. He decided to go along with the gag for a while. "Sure," he said, "but aren't you forgetting something? There were a few details."

"I don't think so. What?"

"The time element. That beauty contest you're talking about happened **maybe** ten thousand years ago."

"Time? Years?" said the

naked girl. "What is time?" she pouted. "What are years?"

"Come on," Ab said.

She misunderstood him. She smiled and came on. Came right down on his lap and parted her lips and shut her eyes and still managed to look up at him dreamily.

He squirmed. She rolled off him with a grunt of surprise and sat on the floor. "Oh, I *am* sorry," she said. "I see why you're mad. It sounds as if I'm trying to prejudice you in favor of Aphrodite over her two fellow-contestants, when really I ought to maintain a neutral attitude. Is that it? Don't tell Hera, please. She's the queen and would be furious. And you better not tell Athena, that amazon . . ."

"Amazon?" Ab demanded. "I thought Athena was goddess of Wisdom."

"Goodness no. Not yet. She's goddess of War."

"Ah!" Ab cried. "You said not yet. So you do know what time is."

"Time? N-no. I said not yet. She is not yet goddess of Wisdom. Right now she is goddess of War. What has this to do with time?"

"Now and yet . . ." Ab began. "Hell! Never mind. It's too involved."

"You'll come with me and be our judge?"

Ab sighed. If he said no she'd start asking all over again. If he called her bluff, said yes, she'd have to admit the whole thing was an elaborate hoax. "Sure," he said, "I'm your man."

The girl jumped up and landed on his lap again. Her bare arms entwined about his neck. Her face swam up toward his with a radiant smile. "You see," she whispered, her lips brushing his lips, "everybody was afraid if one of us gods or goddesses was the judge, he'd be prejudiced. So we wanted a mortal, and one young enough to appreciate the immortal charms of Hera, Athena and Aphrodite, and . . . well, like you, Ab. You do appreciate such charms, don't you?"

Such charms were now inches from Ab. Less than inches. Touching. Against his better judgment, Ab appreciated them to the fullest. His senses swam, and sang, and pounded, and rode a wild ocean storm and finally plummeted into a relaxing, all-engulfing pit of blackness. . . .

"Here," said the girl. "I forgot to give you this."

Bright sunshine. A steep rocky hillside rich with the tangy scent of wild thyme. An unfamiliar, shaggy itch. Ab

looked down at himself. He was wearing a rough wool cloak. He carried a shepherd's crook in his hand. Sheep bleated. He was all but surrounded by sheep. He had never been this close to sheep before. Their coats smelled. They milled about.

"I thought I'd dress you like the local yokels," the girl said. "Hope you don't mind, Ab Paris."

"Just please for crying out loud get me away from these animals."

The girl took his hand. They walked a little way up the steep hillside. The wild thyme made Ab sneeze. The sheep did not follow them.

"Here," said the girl again. She held something out. It was round and gleamed in the sunlight. It was about the size of a large apple. It was gold.

"The golden apple of discord!" gasped Ab, remembering the legend told by the publicity men. "So that's who you are, you're Eris, goddess of Discord."

"Celestial trouble-maker," Eris said with a smile and a toss of her lovely blonde hair. "Discord, you see? Tell me true, after last night will you ever be satisfied with another female—mortal or goddess?"

Ab looked at her, and remembered. He shook his head

slowly. "You see," Eris told him proudly, "that's what I mean. Discord. Coming?"

"Where?" asked Ab.

"Why, up to the top of the hill, of course. It's Mount Ida. The gods and goddesses are waiting."

Ab took the golden apple. It was very heavy and seemed to be solid gold. On it was inscribed: **FOR THE FAIREST.**

"Come, Paris," said Eris. She took his free hand and together they climbed the steep hillside.

She was right about the gods and goddesses. They were waiting, all right.

They were assembled before a great temple on the flat top of Mount Ida. The temple columns were of a white marble which glowed and almost seemed translucent in the bright sunlight. The gods wore white mantles. The goddesses, like Eris in the warm weather and brilliant sunshine, were naked. Merely seeing them from a long way off, Ab forgot all about Steel Pier. Pink and white and tawny limbs flashed before his eyes. Bewitching eyes stared frankly, brazenly at him. Moist red mouths smiled. . . .

Eris plucked the apple from

his fingers and ran up the hillside. At the top she stooped down and rolled the apple. Everyone saw the words, **FOR THE FAIREST.**

A stately old man with a long, flowing white beard and the shoulders of a smithy picked up the apple and said, "Ah, Eris, Eris, then you are awarding it to my wife, to regal Herra?"

"The heck you say," said Eris. "This mortal named Paris who I found in the Troy Hotel in Atlan . . ."

"Paris of Troy!" cried Zeus, for such was the stately old man. "I have heard of him. What about Paris?"

". . . tic City, is here to judge our beauty contest objectively, as only a mortal from Atlantic City can, and award the golden apple to the Fairest. Is it agreed?"

Zeus gazed at her reluctantly. "It's your apple, Eris," he said after a while. He called: "Are the contestants ready?"

A trumpet blared. A herald, whose name was Hermes, said the contestants were ready, and waiting. All the gods and goddesses seemed very excited. Eris led Ab toward the marble temple.

"I forgot my tape measure!" he blurted.

"We don't use tape measures here," Eris told him.

As in a dream, Ab approached the marble temple. But this was no dream—and certainly no hoax. It was all impossibly, incredibly true. All happening to him.

Eris touched his shoulder. He turned around and she fell into his arms. He kissed her. "Remember last night," she said.

"Umm-mm," he said, remembering, sighing.

"They'll make promises. They'll promise you anything," Eris said quickly, excitedly. "It's not like the beauty contests you're familiar with. Don't listen to them. Don't listen to anything they say, or you're lost. Promise?"

Ab nodded. Someone shut off the sunlight. Eris was gone.

He stood in a small dark room. A single spotlight penetrated the gloom, shining upon a pedestal in one corner of the room. On the pedestal stood a woman. Ab Paris gawked.

She was divinely lovely. Literally, of course. She was the palest white, like marble. She did not move. She seemed frozen there. She was wearing a haughty, regal smile. She was wearing nothing else,

except a crown of laurel on her dark hair. Every line and curve of her body was regally poised. She was beauty and royalty in one. She was the pot of gold at the end of every man's rainbow. But then, Ab hadn't seen her two competitors yet. And besides, he was willing to bet she wouldn't dream of doing the uninhibited things that the pixie-beauty Eris would do as a matter of course.

"Stop, mortal!" said the regally beautiful woman. "Come no closer. Don't dare touch me."

"I wasn't going to," Ab said, somehow feeling guilty.

"It is well, mortal." Her voice was contralto, sonorous, regal. She smiled a condescending smile. "Need you look further?" she demanded. "Is not the mere sight of Hera enough to give you your decision? Come, mortal, place the Golden Apple at the feet of the Fairest."

Ab looked at her. Hera, Queen of the gods. With a superiority complex from here to next Thursday. And a husband who could probably enforce her wishes with thunderbolts and floods and earthquakes, a husband who ruled the sky and whose brothers ruled the earth and the sea.

"I really ought to see the

other contestants," Ab said quickly, timidly. "You know, just as a matter of course?"

A cloud of anger threatened Hera's regal composure, but in seconds her serene smile returned. "Listen well," she said. "Listen well, mortal. Award the apple to me and I in turn will award you with that which is mine to command."

"Which means?" asked Ab, growing bold because Hera seemed uncertain of herself.

"Power, you fool!" cried the Queen of the gods. "Give the apple to me and I will give you power over men such as no mortal has ever had. Award me the apple and you rule the world of men!"

She could do it, naturally. It never entered Ab's head that she could not. Power over men, more power than Alexander and Genghis Khan and Tamerlane and Napoleon and Hitler rolled into one. . . .

But Ab Paris was a practical man. If Hera offered the power to rule, what would Athena offer. Athena, first goddess of War, then goddess of Wisdom? And what Aphrodite, goddess of Love?

Ab said: "I'll keep it in mind, baby, but I'll have to see the others."

"Baby!" squawked Hera.

Thunder brooded and rolled and roared and split overhead. Lightning flashed and crackled and glowed. "Baby? Give me that apple!"

She reached out for it, moving for the first time since Ab had seen her. He shook his head stubbornly, hiding the apple under his cloak. Finally, Hera laughed and stepped back on her pedestal. "Power over men," she said. "Remember."

She folded her bare arms serenely over breasts like marble and shut her eyes and smiled. The last Ab saw of her was her crown of laurel.

The second woman carried a shield and a spear and wore an aegis. She was tall as Hera but robust rather than stately. She stood in an open field and leaned on the haft of her spear. Her face and bare limbs were covered with a sheen of sweat, but despite it and her robust appearance, she was quite beautiful.

"Athena," said Ab. "Goddess of War."

Athena leaned heavily on her spear. "I'm tired of war," she said. "They don't know it on Olympus, but I'm through with war. I want to be goddess of Wisdom. I'm smart enough, too."

"I'll bet you are," Ab said.

"Too much killing and bloodshed. I hate it."

"Yes."

She stretched out her hand, the one that did not hold the spear. "May I have the apple now, please?" she asked.

"I haven't seen Aphrodite yet," Ab said, backing away.

"Really! That little snip! You've seen Hera. You've seen me. Who's the Fairest?"

"I haven't seen . . ."

"Fool!" cried Athena. "Don't you understand? I'm giving up my post as goddess of War. A woman oughtn't to be in charge of war, anyhow. I'll next be goddess of Wisdom and I'll be able to appoint my successor. How would you like to be—god of War?"

"Me?" gasped Ab.

"Sure. We'll change your name to—let me see—to Ares. How does that sound? Ares, god of War, we'll call you." Athena smiled a strong, almost masculine smile. "If you award me the golden apple."

"I still haven't seen Aphrodite, ma'am," said Ab in a small voice.

Boldness and uncertainty fought for control in him. Now his legs felt weak, his mouth was dry, his pulses pounded. The next minute he thought the goddesses were afraid of what his decision might be, and acted accord-

ingly. But god of War . . . to be a deity, immortal, eternally feasting on Mount Olympus while generations came and went . . .

"Fool!" cried Athena. "I could slay you with the spear of my office, but no, no. I offer you instead immortality and godhood—for an apple. You'll give it to me?"

Perhaps he should say yes, Ab thought. Perhaps he should have said yes to Hera. He had thought no one could offer him more than Hera had, until he'd seen Athena. He shook his head stubbornly. That being the case, he'd have to finish his job and see Aphrodite, goddess of Love, wouldn't he?

"Maybe," he said. "After I see . . ."

Athena, who still hadn't learned the wisdom she would one day have, shook her spear, then brandished it, then hurled it. Ab ran, and was a little surprised that she did not pursue him.

"Remember," she called. "I'll make you god of War!"

Darkness. Soft music. Fragrance of myrrh and frankincense. Then soft light. Aphrodite, naturally, was waiting for him in a bedroom.

The lighting was artfully indirect, clouds of incense bil-

lowed up from an unseen source, and Aphrodite reclined languorously on a divan. She wore a gown of sea foam and spider webs, the most incredible garment Ab had ever seen. It shifted and bubbled and frothed and foamed with the light and the clouds of incense, alternately concealing and revealing the pink and white beauty of Aphrodite.

She smiled up lazily at Ab and crooked her finger, saying: "But you're way over there and I'm way over here. Come to me, mortal."

Stiffly, Ab walked to the divan. The woman—or goddess—seemed to give off an almost palpable aura of physical attraction. Goddess of love, Ab thought with what little of his mind was still objective, so why not?

The languorous smile had depths within depths within depths. "Tell me, mortal," she said, "what my two competitors offered you. I realize, naturally, that their votive offerings couldn't match mine, but I'm mildly curious."

"P-power," stammered Ab, drawing closer, "and the post as god of War. I said—"

"You said—" reaching out and grasping his hand and drawing him down toward her—"you'd choose love, of course."

"Love?" Ab repeated her word. "I don't really . . ."

"Physical love, mortal. As only Aphrodite can offer. Here, drink this." She held out a cup of gold and looked at the golden apple in Ab's hand. He stuffed the apple inside his rough cloak and took the cup. It was an icy cold, fruity, altogether delicious wine.

"We call it nectar," Aphrodite explained, "and it isn't every mortal who gets a chance to drink it."

"Thank you," said Ab, quaffing what was in the cup.

Aphrodite smiled, patted his hand, and refilled the cup from a golden flagon. Ab drank and presently found himself reclining alongside the immortal beauty. Aphrodite fondled his cheek, and refilled his cup again. He drank. His head commenced whirling. Aphrodite fondled his shoulder. Her hands slipped under his cloak, exploring . . .

"Hey, wait a minute!" Ab howled, springing dizzily to his feet and overturning the flagon of nectar in his haste. Aphrodite fell away from him in surprise and rolled off the divan, the peignoir trailing after her like a reluctant fog.

"You were trying to get hold of the golden apple!" Ab accused his divine hostess.

"Well, you don't have to be so self-righteous! Try to tell me you weren't enjoying yourself."

"That's beside the point. The apple belongs to the Fair-est."

"Well," sniffed Aphrodite, "you've seen the three of us. Is there any doubt?"

Ab took a deep breath. If the nectar had not given him courage and confidence, he never would have spoken the way he did. After all, Aphrodite *was* a goddess. She sat there listening, her mouth slack and moistly parted. Ab had seen mouths like that before, on pin-up calendars and in the movies. He had always wondered where the models and actresses got the idea. Now he knew, and it seemed natural enough. Exhaling his deep breath, Ab told the goddess:

"Yeah, I've seen the three of you, but heck, I didn't have to. You've each got something to offer and the way I figure it, that's more important than how you look. Hera would grant me more power over men than a mortal ever had if I give her the golden apple. Athena will make me god of War. But what about you, Aphrodite? Why don't you speak your piece?"

The goddess glowered, as only a goddess, and particularly the goddess of Earthly Love, could. She slapped Ab's face. Her immortal palm had a sting to it. "I offered you the chance to make love to the goddess of Love, fool!" she cried.

"That makes three," Ab told her, the fumes of the nectar still beclouding his better judgment. "All three of you called me fool. And besides, who says I want to make love to some old goddess? Give me a . . ."

"That can be arranged!" Aphrodite said, suddenly cager. "Suppose I give you the most beautiful mortal woman in all the world—in exchange for the apple. Is it a deal?" She swivel-hipped her way to him and gave him that lips-parted look again.

Ab's senses reeled. Give him more power than all the conquerors and dictators from Alexander to Hitler, and he wouldn't know what to do with it. Give him the role of god of War and he'd have nightmares over all the carnage done in his name. But give him the world's most beautiful woman—he'd know what to do with that all right.

"Then the apple's mine?" Aphrodite demanded.

"I didn't say that, God-

dess," Ab told her, drawing the apple out of her reach. "Could I at least see the—uh, specimen?"

"Arranged!" cried Aphrodite, snapping her fingers.

Far off, a gong sounded. A form took shape in the clouds of incense, coalescing there. Ab gasped.

It seemed to be Eris.

"But she's no mortal!" Ab protested. "She's Eris, goddess of Discord." Eris winked.

"Just a little-bitty half-goddess, actually," Aphrodite said. "She qualifies as a mortal. You want her?"

"But I thought . . . according to legend . . . Helen of Troy . . . the face that launched a thousand ships . . . you know . . ."

"Whatever are you talking about?" Aphrodite asked him.

"I thought Helen of Troy was supposed to be the most beautiful woman in the world."

"Eris' sister?" demanded Aphrodite.

"Sister? Sister, you've got your genealogies confused. They aren't sisters, not according to the mythology books."

"Then," said the image of Eris, "the mythology books are wrong. We're not only sisters, we're twins. Of course,

if you ever saw Helen wearing just exactly what I'm wearing. . . ."

"You mean, not wearing," corrected Ab. Aphrodite laughed.

Eris went on: "If you ever saw her, you'd know why Aphrodite selected me. Poor Helen, we look exactly alike except she's got the funniest little strawberry birthmark."

Aphrodite asked: "Well, what do you say, mortal? Here is your reward. Eris, half-goddess of Discord and twin sister to Helen of Troy. Your decision?"

Ab pondered it for long moments. He wanted to be an impartial judge, sure enough. He remembered Atlantic City and told himself that the two situations were roughly identical. But Hera's reward overwhelmed him, Athena's would bathe him in blood. Only Aphrodite's made sense to him. And, he thought dreamily, looking at the lovely image in the incense, what sense it made!

"Well?" Aphrodite demanded, growing impatient.

He might have said yes. Afterwards, he wasn't sure. He never had a chance, because Eris' image stamped its foot and cried:

"Hey, wait a minute! You

mean he's going to award the apple to you, to get me? Don't I have something to say about it? Don't I have anything to say?"

"I hardly think a half-goddess," Aphrodite told her frostily, "has to be consulted before a goddess makes a decision."

The image of Eris, furious now, alighted on the floor. Now that it was furious it didn't look much like an image. It looked like Eris in the flesh and blood, or half flesh and blood, or whatever a demi-goddess was. It stalked across the room at Ab and held out its hand. "I'll take the apple," it said.

"Like Hades you will!" bawled Aphrodite in a lusty voice.

"It was my apple to begin with!" hollered Eris. "I'll be darned if some mortal's going to take it and give it to a goddess to buy me with."

"But you don't understand," Ab tried to explain in a minute voice, holding the apple behind his back. "I really do . . . you see, after last night . . . I actually . . . Eris, it wouldn't be as if I didn't . . ."

"What's he trying to say?" Aphrodite asked.

"Search me," said Eris.

"I really do love you, Eris!"

Ab finally blurted. But still held the apple behind his back.

"Oh yes? How nice. How nice for you. That still doesn't mean I can be traded for an— an apple!"

"Your decision?" said Aphrodite.

The goddess and the demigoddess had backed him into a corner of the room. He stood there, the apple behind his back. He breathed in a great lungful of air and shouted: "I haven't made my decision yet! I want to see all three contestants together—and in public."

He couldn't face them in private again, he knew that. Not that he knew what his decision would be. True, he'd only known Eris for a few hours, but if there was such a thing as love at first sight, why not love after a few hours? He did love the demigoddess, that much he knew. But she'd never consent to being traded for a golden apple, so he couldn't win her by awarding the apple to Aphrodite. On the other hand, if he awarded it to Hera and became the most powerful despot in the history of mankind, he obviously wouldn't have time for Eris. On the third hand, if he awarded the

apple to Athena and accepted the post of War god, it would be undignified to take Eris along with him as a camp-follower. It was, he decided, a problem of mountainous proportions.

Just as he decided this, Aphrodite's bedroom faded.

Bright sunlight took its place. Ab blinked in the sunlight and saw a stadium built on one sloping side of Mount Ida. The stadium was chock-full of people. No, make that gods and goddesses.

On the stadium floor were three pedestals. One for Aphrodite, one for Athena, one for Hera. The goddesses in question appeared. All three looked serenely confident as they mounted their marble pedestals. It was some beauty contest, thought Ab. Sure, the three of them were beautiful, but that hardly mattered. They each offered Ab a great reward in exchange for the apple of discord, and that *did* matter. Power. Godhood. Beauty and love, except that the beauty in question would never love him if she were given to him in exchange for the apple.

Thunder rumbled in the sunlit sky, the crowds of major and minor gods and goddesses fell silent, and Zeus' booming voice roared:

"Mortal, have you reached a decision?"

Before Ab could answer, if he was going to answer, Eris came walking boldly across the sand of the arena floor. She took her stand alongside Ab, then thought better of it and moved a few paces off, wearing her hands on her hips, and a smile, and a sun-tan.

"What is the meaning of this?" Zeus demanded.

"Since it was my apple in the first place, O Zeus," Eris declared, "I thought it only fair that I watch the awarding of it."

"I love you!" Ab told her in a stage whisper.

"Giving my apple to that . . . that immortal hussy!" snapped Eris peevishly.

"I haven't given your apple to anybody."

"But you were going to."

"I never . . ."

"If you think you can have me and my love for a piece of fruit, Abner Paris, you've got another guess coming!"

"Mortal, have you reached a decision?" Zeus asked a second time, impatiently.

Ab studied the apple.

"Power," said Hera. Thunder cracked overhead.

"Godhood," said Athena. Phalanxes of Spartan hoplites

marched rank on rank across the arena floor.

"Earthly love," said Aphrodite, and merely smiled her languid smile.

Eris stamped her foot angrily.

Ab studied the contestants. He pivoted slowly and studied the audience of eager gods and goddesses. Slowly he held the apple out.

He walked in front of the three pedestals.

"I'm a mortal," he said in the absolute silence. "I don't know much about divine beauty, I guess." The gods waited, not breathing, not that gods breathed. "But I know plenty about mortal beauty." He walked over to Eris. "Or half-mortal beauty. I'm giving the golden apple, marked FOR THE FAIREST, back to its original owner. Close as I can tell, Eris is the fairest."

He never remembered with accuracy what happened after that. There was a stunned instant of silence. Eris clutched the apple and clutched him and murmured words of love in his ear. The three goddesses got down wrathfully from their pedestals. Athena's spear zipped by his ear. Zeus' thunders thundered. Ab grabbed Eris' hand and ran stumbling across the sand. But the

faces in the grandstand were hostile.

"Quick! Which way?" cried Ab.

"Back to where you come from," yelled Eris.

The grandstand blurred. Another spear impaled Ab, but as it did so it became tenuous and quite harmless. Mount Ida sank into a sea of blackness. . . .

"Well, here we are in the Troy Hotel, Ab Paris," Eris said.

"I've got to buy you some clothing," Ab told her.

"Well, if you insist."

He insisted. "At least long enough to take you outside somewhere and marry you."

"Yes," she said. They kissed.

"Eris?" he said after a while.

"Yes?"

"I was wondering. The Trojan War."

"Oh, are the Trojans going to have a war?"

"Heck, yes. You see, when Paris awarded the golden apple to Aphrodite—"

"But you didn't award it to that hussy. You gave it to me."

"But the legend says that when Paris gave Aphrodite

the apple, she came through with her half of the bargain, kidnapping Helen, wife of the King of Sparta, for Paris. Then, see, Paris takes her to Troy with him and all the Greeks, led by Agamemnon, brother of the King of Sparta, get real mad and go after him. And the Greeks fight the Trojans, and that's called the Trojan War."

"But it didn't happen that way," Eris said.

"But—"

Eris held up the apple. "See?"

"Yes, but—"

"Besides, if Athena's resigning as goddess of War, maybe she wants to have one last fling. Can you think of a better war than a war between the Greeks and the Trojans?"

Ab said he could not. Eris held the golden apple in front of her bosom. Ab was busy studying the apple, sort of. Mighty pretty fruit.

"Then the whole legend's a phony," said Ab indignantly.

"If you forget the legend, I'll forget the apple."

Ab nodded. Eris put down the apple.

When they came up for air they went outside and got married.

THE END

LOST ON A PLANET OF WOMEN!



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WAYS TO GET A GAL

By P. G. WODEHOUSE

Mabel had everything any man could ever want. But she couldn't be picked off a tree like a grape. She had to be won like any ordinary gal. So the millionaire, the playboy and the butler tried to think up ways to get the gal. Which one would you bet on?

OPENING his eyes to a new day, young Lord Barminster ("Barmy" to his friends) found Wilson, his valet, at his bedside with the morning cup of tea, and after he had taken a refreshing sip or two he said:

"Tell me, Wilson, have you ever wooed?"

"M'lord?"

"Put it another way. Have you ever been in love?"

"From time to time, m'lord."



What was the key to
Mabel's heart—

"Did any business result?"

"Virtually none, m'lord."

"Ah," said Barmy, "and I'll tell you why. You didn't go the right way to work. You had no system. Ask me what I mean by the word system, Wilson."

"What does your lordship mean by the word system?"

"By the word system," said Barmy. "I mean system. What is technically known as wooing is a thing that can't be rushed. To produce the best results you must ease into it by degrees and operate on a schedule. See what I mean?"

"Not entirely, m'lord."

"Well, first you find the girl. Essential, that."

"Just so, m'lord."

"This done, you look at her. Say for about a couple of weeks."

"Look at her, m'lord?"

"Fixedly. I might even use the word goggle. You stand in front of her and drink her silently in . . . with, of course, the lovelight in your eyes. This goes on, as I say, for about two weeks. Third week, send her flowers. Fourth week, gifts with a bit more zip to them, as it might be something in the nature of jewelry. Fifth week, propose. Softened up by those preliminary doings, she's pretty well bound to say Right-ho. What

do you think of it? I shall be glad to have your views."

"If your lordship will pardon me, I find it a trifle elaborate. In Lower Smattering, I remember,—"

"What on earth's Lower Smattering?"

"The village where I spent my boyhood, m'lord. The prevailing practice there was to take the young person for a walk and kiss her."

Barmy shook his head.

"I dare say that sort of thing might work in a village," he said, "but for London you need the scientific approach. This is by far the best way."

It was some ten days later that Wilson, bringing in the before-luncheon cocktail, was requested by his employer to go out and purchase two dozen of the best red roses. There was a significant look in Barmy's eye as he gave the order.

"Flowers, Wilson."

"Very good, m'lord."

"Get the idea? Third week. The good old system."

"M'lord?"

"Don't tell me you've forgotten what I was saying about the system."

"Oh, no, m'lord, but I was a little surprised. Am I to understand that your lordship

is contemplating matrimony?"

"That's right. And of course I'm trying out the system. For two weeks I have been standing in front of the adored object, goggling silently."

"Did not that make your lordship somewhat noticeable?"

"I wanted to be noticeable. That was the whole idea. I wanted to get her saying to herself 'Hell, this bird seems to be cropping up a bit these days. What can this signify?' But I see what you mean. You imply that she might have called a cop."

"Or a medical gentleman specializing in aberrations of the brain."

"Ah, but at the same time I

was buying gloves. She who I hope will shortly clock in as Lady Barminster — Mabel Parker is the name—works in the glove department at Harridge's Stores, and I did my goggling across the counter. Take those roses to her this afternoon, Wilson, and I shall want you to deliver a similar nosegay each day this week. I am convinced," said Barmy, "that this system of mine will bring home the bacon. Reason it out for yourself. When a girl sees a man come in day after day and buy gloves and stand gazing at her spellbound, she's going to think a bit and put two and two together. I would offer attractive odds that it won't be long before those wedding bells are ringing out . . . blithely, as the expression is. Of course you'll stay on with me after the nup-whatever-the-word is."

"Nuptials, m'lord. I fear that will be impossible. I had intended to inform your lordship this morning that I must regretfully tender my notice. I am retiring and buying a small restaurant."

"Golly! Been robbing a bank or something?"

"I was fortunate enough to place a substantial sum on a long-priced winner at a recent race meeting, m'lord."



Masculine muscles—?

"Some fellows have all the luck. That was how Mr. Galloway started. Had a good day at Belmont Park, bought a restaurant, branched out and now owns half the eating houses in America."

"Indeed, m'lord? A romance of commerce. I should have mentioned earlier that Mr. Galloway rang up on the telephone while your lordship was out this morning."

"He did? I'll tell you what that means, Wilson. He's in England."

"Yes, m'lord, and he hopes your lordship will dine with him tonight at his club."

"I will," said Barmy. "Give him a buzz and tell him I'll be there not only with bells on but with my hair in a braid."

He was always, even at the shortest notice, at Mr. Galloway's disposal, for the latter was the fountain head from which he drew his handsome monthly allowance.

Barmy's mother had been a Miss Galloway of upper Park Avenue, and Andrew Galloway, the multiple restaurant owner, was her brother. Between him and his young nephew there had always existed the most cordial relations, and it was generally understood that when the superfatted old gentleman eventually succumbed to the

apoplectic seizure which he had been courting since his early thirties, Barmy would come into the money which the other scooped in each year in such heaping handfuls.

It was an arrangement which suited Barmy down to the ground. This is the age of the specialist, and even as a boy, hardly capable of connected thought, he had become convinced that his specialty, the thing he could do really well, was to inherit money. There was always the danger, of course, that Mr. Galloway might marry again and this time start supplying the world with little Galloway's as well as restaurants, which would naturally upset the form book a good deal, but the betting was very much against it. He had tried the holy state thrice, each time unsuccessfully, and after his third divorce some years ago had appeared to have packed up. Enough was enough it seemed.

It was consequently with no premonition of impending doom that Barmy made his way to the tryst, and after a couple of strengthening cocktails seated himself opposite his uncle at a table in the corner of the dining room.

Dinner with Andrew Gal-

loway was never just a quick-lunch-counter scuffle. He believed that a man who is running a large chain of restaurants should build his strength up. It was not immediately, therefore, that the meal became a feast of reason and a flow of soul. Indeed, the two revellers had lighted their cigars before the elder gave forth any remark that was not purely gastronomic. When he did jerk the conversation up into a higher plane, he jerked it hard. He sent it shooting into the realms of the soulful with a whizz.

"George," he said, for that was Barmy's name, "do you believe in love at first sight?"

Barmy, in the act of sipping a liqueur brandy, lowered the glass. It would be absurd to say that he looked at his uncle keenly, for he was not capable of looking keenly at anyone. But he did look like a rather puzzled halibut. His host's table talk had never before run on these lines.

"Oh, yes," he said guardedly.

"Me, too," said Mr. Galloway. "Amazing," he proceeded, "how young I'm feeling tonight. And, darn it, I'm not so very old. Men have married at twice my age."

Strictly speaking, this was

incorrect, unless one counted Methusalah, but perhaps Mr. Galloway spoke figuratively.

Barmy had paled. The cigar trembled in his nerveless fingers. He did not at all like the way things seemed to be shaping.

"Are you . . . Were you . . . Are you thinking of getting married again, uncle?"

"You have guessed my secret. You have probably often wondered why, being in the prime of life and having had a romantic nature since early boyhood, I have remained single all these years. The reason is simple. I could never find a woman who was not on some kind of a diet. Every time I contacted a likely prospect and passion was beginning to burgeon, it would transpire that the misguided female's idea of a square meal was a slice of Melba toast and a piece of pineapple. Naturally, on discovering this, I was off over the horizon like a jack rabbit, and any attempt to drag me to the altar would have been fought with tooth and claw. And so things went on until this morning, when I had a remarkable spiritual experience. I had gone into Harridge's Stores to buy a pair of gloves. When all of a sudden—"

Mr. Galloway was a sub-

stantial man, two hundred and fifteen pounds on the hoof, but as he spoke these words he seemed to his nephew to flicker like an old-time silent picture.

"Gug-gug-gloves?" faltered Barmy.

"Leather, for motoring purposes. And as my eyes fell on the girl behind the counter, something seemed to go all over me like the hives. Love at first sight," explained Mr. Galloway. "It frequently happens, of course. Look at Romeo."

He sighed sentimentally. He may have been wheezing, but it was more probably a sigh.

Barmy did his best.

"I know the girl you mean," he said, trying to keep his voice from shaking. "I buy my gloves at Harridge's. Tallish girl with blue eyes."

"And also hair like molten gold and teeth like pearls. Her name, I ascertained, is Mabel Parker."

"That's the one. Well, I'm sorry to tell you, uncle, that she is on that diet where you live, if you can call it living, mostly on black strap molasses."

Mr. Galloway shook his head.

"You must be thinking of some other girl. This one

would draw herself up like an offended princess if you so much as showed her a spoonful of black strap molasses. This is no hastily formed impression. I speak of what I know. I chanced, being in something of a hurry, to go for my lunch to a little restaurant across the way from Harridge's. She was there with some other girls, and I gathered from their conversation that she had won the store Derby sweep and was celebrating. And did she celebrate! Hors d'oeuvres, soup, some kind of fish and two goes at the Hungarian goulash. And when she topped it off with strawberry shortcake smothered in whipped cream, I knew that I had found my affinity. My heart stood still."



Immortality on canvas—?

Barmy eyed him with fallen jaw. His liqueur had turned to wormwood.

"You certainly would appear to have got it up your nose," he said dully. "Er—when is it to be? The wedding and all that?"

"Almost immediately. I shall propose to her tomorrow."

Barmy moistened his lips with the tip of the tongue.

"I wouldn't do that, uncle. Rather rushing it, what? The cagey move is to ease into the thing by degrees and operate on a system. What I would advise is that for a couple of weeks you just look at her. Third week, send her flowers. Fourth week . . ."

"I see what you mean. Give her time to become accustomed to seeing me about the place, you think?"

"Exactly. You want to sink in, as it were."

Mr. Galloway puffed thoughtfully at his cigar.

"There may be something in that. You're not such a fool as you look, George. Well, it would hardly be possible for you to be, would it?" he said reasonably. "All right, then. For the next two weeks I'll look at her, but I won't send flowers the third week, not to a girl like that. I'll send pâté de fois gras, caviar,

hams, chickens and champagne."

If somebody had told Barmy, as he left his uncle's club that night, that he was standing at a young man's cross-roads, he would have gaped and said "Eh, what?", not getting the gist, but that was of course precisely what he was doing.

Two courses were open to him. He could withdraw from the contest, leaving Mr. Galloway to carry on as planned, or he could continue to pursue his wooing. Love suggested the latter policy, Prudence the former. If, Prudence pointed out, Mr. Galloway were to discover one morning that his nephew had just married the girl whom he, Mr.



Baubles from Tiffany's—?

Galloway, had been hoping to marry himself, he might well be expected to look askance at that nephew. Few things so speedily modify an uncle's love as the news that his sister's child has jumped in ahead of him and snaffled the bride-to-be. In such circumstances an uncle is extremely likely to call for his lawyer and his fountain pen and start altering wills and cancelling allowances.

It was a problem that called for much weighing of this against that, and the only thing to do when you have a spot of this-against-that-weighting on your hands is to get away from it all and seek some rural nook, far from the hustle and bustle of the metropolis, where you can give yourself up to quiet, uninterrupted meditation. There was a fishing inn about fifty miles up the Thames where Barmy went occasionally when he felt the urge to try to catch a gudgeon or two. He decided to go there now and plunge into thought. He notified Wilson of his plans next morning over the early cup of tea.

"Today's Saturday, isn't it, Wilson?"

"Yes, m'lord."

"So tomorrow will be Sunday. Well, I shall be going off to that place up the river this

afternoon and shall be away till . . . what's the name of the day that comes after Sunday? It's on the tip of my tongue."

"Monday, m'lord."

"That's right, Monday. Expect me back to dinner on Monday night."

It would be distasteful to describe in detail the soul torments which the young man passed between the hours of 4.30, when he started off in his Jaguar, and 7.30, when he started back. These morbidities are better left to the Russian novelists. Suffice it to say that with Love pulling him this way and Prudence that, till he felt like a worm that has had the misfortune to be grabbed at both ends by two simultaneous Plymouth Rocks, he suffered considerable agony of spirit. It was only after an early dinner consisting of steak and two veg that he made his decision.

He would obey the dictates of Love. His uncle, as Prudence kept repeating like a parrot, would unquestionably stop his allowance and cut him out of his will, but what of that? What, if you came right down to it, was money? Looking at it squarely, just dross. And, anyway, if you wanted the stuff, all you had to do was to pop over to America, win

one of those \$64,000 questions, and there you were.

It was consequently with as much as he could remember of a popular song on his lips that he braked the Jaguar outside the building where he lived and went up to his apartment. But scarcely had he turned the key in the door when it—the song, not the key—died away in a hollow gurgle, and a sharp “Well, I’ll be dashed!” escaped him. He halted in his tracks. Like Othello, he was perplexed in the extreme.

The dining room of the apartment was to the left as you entered. Its door was closed, and through it there had come a sudden laugh. And not Wilson’s laugh, either. Barmy would have had no objection to Wilson indulging in a guffaw or two, if so disposed. This was a feminine laugh, and it outraged Barmy to think that in his absence his personal attendant should be using his apartment for the entertainment of lady friends.

“Wilson!” he bellowed, and a moment later Wilson emerged, looking like a personal attendant who has been tucking into chicken and champagne.

He seemed a little aggrieved.

“I had not expected you

back, m’lord,” he said, and in his voice there was a touch of rebuke.

“So I should think!” said Barmy. “So I should surmise! I like your crust, turning my respectable home into an abode of love.”

“Love conquers all, m’lord.”

“I dare say it does, but that doesn’t alter the fact that you’re fired. Though wait,” said Barmy, reflecting. “It’s no good firing you, is it? I mean, you’re leaving already. Still, I should like to mark my displeasure. Consider it marked.”

“Very good, m’lord.”

“Have you been doing this sort of thing often in my absence?”

“Never before, m’lord. This was a special occasion. Wedding breakfast, m’lord.”

Barmy gaped.

“When did you get married?”

“This morning, m’lord.”

“Well, blow me tight! You might have let me know.”

“I felt that sealed lips would be more advisable, m’lord.”

“Perhaps you’re right. Nice girl, is she?”

“Extremely, m’lord. I believe your lordship knows her by sight. Until this morning, when she resigned her portfolio, she held an executive

post at Harridge's Stores. In the glove department, m'lord. If your lordship recollects, I have been delivering long-stemmed roses to her throughout the week. It was indeed," proceeded Wilson, a soft glow in his eyes, "this that brought us together. I rather fancy, thinking back, that I may inadvertently have given her the impression that the blooms were a personal tribute from myself. From remarks which she let fall I suspected that some such misunderstanding had occurred, but these things are so difficult to put right, particularly if one's mind is elsewhere."

"Your mind was elsewhere, was it?"

"Precisely, m'lord. It still is."

"Yes," said Barmy bitterly, "I suppose it's riveted on that cold chicken you've swiped from the ice box. And I've no doubt you've helped yourself liberally to my champagne."

"Oh, no, m'lord," said Wilson, shocked. "I would not have dreamed of taking such a liberty. Both chicken and champagne were a gift to Mrs. Wilson from a gentleman who was in buying gloves a day or two ago. Caviar and pâté de fois gras were also included in the hamper."

A thrill ran through Barmy

from his stay-combed hair to his heliotrope socks. He had forgotten all about Andrew Galloway, and suddenly being reminded of him like this had much the same effect as the sight of a silver lining in the clouds has on a man who likes nice weather. True, he had lost the girl he loved and his heart, of course, was broken, but then it had been broken so many times before by the loss of so many other girls that nowadays he scarcely noticed it. The salient point, the point on which to keep the eye fixed, was that now there would be no nonsense about cutting off allowances and altering wills.

He was conscious of a



Or an iron constitution?

gentle glow of happiness and a strong desire to toast his good luck.

"This gentleman," he said, "this glove-purchasing gentleman, is the champagne he sent all right?"

"Excellent, m'lord. A very good vintage year."

"Then lead me to it, if you don't mind me butting in for a couple of minutes."

"Not at all, m'lord. I am sure Mrs. Wilson will be delighted to make your lordship's acquaintance."

"Tell me, Wilson," said Barmy, as they made for the dining room. "Touching this little

business, I imagine you didn't try the system, what? More the Lower Smattering method, eh?"

"On those lines, m'lord."

"Does everybody in Lower Smattering carry on like that?"

"Yes, m'lord."

"Gosh; if those are the conditions that prevail in Lower Smattering, one tends to ask oneself what life in Upper Smattering must be like. Caviar, did you say, Wilson?"

"And pâté de fois gras, m'lord."

"I can do with both," said Barmy. "Lead on." **THE END**



"Don't call us—we'll call you!"

THE DEVIL NEVER WAITS

By RANDALL GARRETT

ED MACMURTY jammed his token into the subway turnstile, charged through it like an angry bull, and plowed his way through the crowd toward the train platform.

He hadn't noticed the man in the black topcoat who had been knocked aside in his rush, and he wouldn't have cared if he had.

The gentleman in the black topcoat picked up his soft black hat from the pavement and gazed speculatively after the retreating figure of Ed MacMurty. An oddly unpleasant smile crossed his face.

Ed, meanwhile, barreled toward his train. But before he reached it, the doors slid shut, and the train rumbled off into the darkness of the tunnel, leaving Ed MacMurty snarling furiously after it.

Ed MacMurty got tired of waiting for streetcars, subways, and taxis. So the man in the black suit said, "Chum, you won't never hove to wait for nothing nohow — ever ogoin!" Ed thought his problems were solved. Do you agree? Whatever you decide, don't bet on it until you read this story.

"There'll be another along in three minutes," said a smooth voice behind him.

Ed turned to see a man clad entirely in black. Coat, hat, topcoat, trousers, shoes, socks, shirt, necktie—all black. Ed had thought he was a priest at first, but when a faint smile crossed the other's face, he knew he was wrong.

Even the man's hair was black, and his eyes were like polished obsidian.

Somehow, without knowing how he knew, Ed MacMurty was aware of the identity of the man who stood before him. But Ed MacMurty was a brave man; he simply looked at the man and said: "Three minutes is too long."

"Perhaps it is for you, MacMurty. I, myself, have waited much longer."

"I dare say," agreed MacMurty. "But you've got more time than I." Then he narrowed his eyes. "These are all your inventions, I dare say. Subways and trains and busses and planes—all your inventions. A man has to get to the station and wait; then he gets on the train and he waits. All that time wasted when a man could be doing his business. Yes, they're *your* inventions, all right."

The Man in Black looked thoughtful. "I'll not deny, MacMurty, that there may be a germ of truth in what you say. And since you dislike them so, I'm going to do you a favor; I'll relieve you of the necessity of using them. Good-bye, MacMurty."

"I'm asking no favors of you, sir!" shouted MacMurty.

"*Yeeeeeek!* How—how did you get—where did you come from, Mr. MacMurty?"

MacMurty realized with a sudden shock that he was no longer standing in the subway station. He was in his office, and, standing directly before him was his secretary, Louise Alder.

She had had her back turned toward him when he appeared from nowhere, but when she heard his voice, the reaction was violent. To Mac-

Murty, it seemed as though she must have sprained her back in turning so fast.

He saw that she had been arranging his morning mail. Some pieces scattered.

"I—ah—just walked in," said MacMurty.

As the shock wore off, Miss Alder's eyes took on a look of suspicion. "Oh? I see, sir. I'll go now, if you don't—uh—want me anymore."

MacMurty, thoroughly flustered, mumbled, "All right," and walked over to his hat-rack. He took off his hat and coat and sat down to take care of the mail.

It was less than fifteen minutes before there was a rap on the door. It was Guilfoyle, the senior partner; a tall, cadaverous man who contrasted oddly with MacMurty's bull-like rotundity.

"What seems to be the trouble between you and Miss Alder, Mac?"

MacMurty lifted his brows. "Trouble? What trouble?"

"Well, I overheard her say to one of the other girls that you sneaked in early this morning as though you were trying to catch her at something," Guilfoyle said in a funereal voice. "Has her work been unsatisfactory in any way, Mac?"

"Of course not!" MacMurty



The scimitar flashed—the giant bellowed—the girls screamed.

thundered. "What's the matter with that girl?"

Guilfoyle shrugged and backed out the door. "You'd better clear it up with her, then," he said as he closed the door. "Don't want to lose a good employee over a misunderstanding."

MacMurty stood up. "I'll go see her immediately."

Without moving— *Pop!*

MacMurty was standing in a room he had never seen before. It smelled faintly of perfume. Miss Alder was standing in front of a mirror, applying lipstick, and MacMurty's sudden appearance startled her so much that she smeared the crimson stuff all over her cheek.

"Mr. MacMurty! What are you doing in the ladies' lounge?"

"I—I—*ay! yi! Ladies' lounge?*" MacMurty suddenly wished he were home in bed.

He felt suddenly dizzy—diz—

MacMurty's older sister, Belinda, was sweeping the floor outside her brother's bedroom when she heard something bounce on the bed. "Darn that cat," she said, "I've told him to stay off—" She flung the door open wide. Her eyes did likewise, and, a moment later, her mouth fol-

lowed suit. "Edwin MacMurty! What do you mean, being in bed with your shoes on? Get out of there this very instant!"

MacMurty leaped out of the bed with alacrity, for his sister Belinda was the one woman in the world who could bellow louder than he.

Belinda speared him with a cold eye. "Why aren't you at the office?"

"Never you mind!" snorted MacMurty. "I'll thank you to remember that this room is my own. I have thinking to do, Belinda, so close the door behind you, if you please."

Taken somewhat aback, Belinda did as she was bid. But not without sniffing loudly as she closed the door.

"Now," said MacMurty, to himself, "what the devil is this all about?"

It seemed, apparently, that any time he wanted to go somewhere—he got dizzy and—there he was. Well, now, that was a theory easily tested.

"I want to go across the room," said MacMurty.

Nothing happened.

"Very well, then, I want to go out in the hall."

Still nothing happened.

And that was very odd, because it was farther from his bedroom to the hall than it

was from his office to the ladies' lounge. Evidently distance had nothing to do with it.

"I want to go to my office!"
The dizziness again.

He was back in his office, which, fortunately for him, was empty. Determinedly, he strode over to his hatrack, took his hat and topcoat and strode toward the door. "I'm going out in the hall," he announced to the empty office.

Again, nothing happened.

He strode through the outer office, heading for the elevators.

Miss Alder ran up to him. "Wait, Mr. MacMurty; where are you going?"

"To Murphy's Bar," he said, on sudden impulse. He started to tell her he could be phoned there, but—

MacMurty swayed . . .

He was standing near his favorite booth in the dim rear of Murphy's Bar & Grill. He glanced around furtively, but, luckily, no one had seen him.

He'd have to watch himself, he thought as he sat down, because if he simply went popping in and out of places, it could become downright embarrassing, to say the least. He could well imagine how he would feel if someone

kept vanishing and appearing all over the place without rhyme nor reason. It wasn't natural, at all!

He knew well enough who was behind it all—but how did anyone go about dealing with such a personage as that?

"What'll it be, Mr. MacMurty?" said a voice. "I didn't see you come in."

MacMurty looked up at the tall figure of Houlihan, the bartender.

"The usual, Houlihan," said MacMurty disconsolately. "And make it double this time."

When Houlihan returned with the double Irish, he sat it down before his customer and said: "Not that it's any business of mine, Mr. MacMurty, but it's not well at all you're looking."

"I shouldn't doubt it," said MacMurty. "I've been doing too much rushing around."

Houlihan shook his head. "A young fellow like you working himself sick. That's not good at all, Mr. MacMurty. Why don't you take a vacation? Why not go to Mexico or somewhere?"

"I'd like to," said MacMurty before he realized what he was saying.

He scowled. That blasted dizziness—

He was standing near an *adobe* Spanish-style villa. Facing him were two dark-faced men in *sombreros* who were staring at him, bug-eyed.

"*Que es esto?*" one of them asked, quivering.

"*El Diablo!*" shouted the other in fear.

"*Madre de Dios!*" moaned the first.

"Back to Murphy's!" bel-lowed MacMurty.

Pop!

Houlihan the bartender was still standing there. He blinked. "Now *that* I consider a good trick, Mr. MacMurty," he said. "Would you mind telling me how you did it?"

MacMurty groaned. "Houlihan, I swear to you, it wasn't I who did it. I—"

There was a sudden commotion at the front door, and MacMurty and Houlihan both swiveled their heads. It was, of all people, Miss Louise Alder, who was marching toward the rear of the bar with a determined click of her high heels. "So there you are!" she said when she spied MacMurty. "Boy, am I glad I found you!"

"What is it, Miss Alder?" MacMurty asked sadly. "More trouble, I suppose?"

She smiled at him. "Mr. MacMurty, I've been your pri-

vate secretary for five years; I suspected there was something wrong with you when you came in this morning. But now I'm sure of it; I was positive when you vanished in the hall."

MacMurty downed his whiskey and indicated to Houlihan that he should refill it. "I don't—" he started to say.

But Houlihan, pouring the drink, looked at Miss Alder and said: "Vanished? Then he pulled it on you, too? It's a very good trick."

"It's no trick," said Miss Alder.

MacMurty perked up suddenly. "How do you know it's no trick?"

"Because—" She leaned forward. "—when you appeared and disappeared in the ladies' lounge, there was a definite aroma of sulfur dioxide left afterwards."

Houlihan looked puzzled. "Sulphur dioxide? And what might that be?"

"Burning brimstone!" Miss Alder whispered.

"*Aaahah!*" said Houlihan, eyeing MacMurty suspiciously.

"It's not my fault!" MacMurty protested; "Listen, I was walking—well, running to catch . . ."

He proceeded to tell them

what had happened from the time he met the Man in Black up to his trip to Mexico.

"Hmmm," said Houlihan. "It sounds mighty convenient. Think of the money you can save on fares!"

"But I don't like it!" MacMurty growled. "I feel like Captain Vanderdecken, of the *Flying Dutchman* — always traveling under a curse."

"You think it's a curse then?" Houlihan asked.

"It's no blessing," said MacMurty.

Miss Alder had been looking thoughtful. "But why is it that it sometimes works and sometimes doesn't?"

"Dam—I mean, *blessed* if I know," MacMurty confessed.

"That's not the point," Houlihan objected. "We've got to get this curse off Mr. MacMurty. Perhaps we should see a priest?"

Miss Alder frowned. "I don't know. Some of these younger men are pretty skeptical. They'd likely think Mr. MacMurty was lying."

"He could prove it," Houlihan said. "All he'd have to do is go someplace."

"Likely I couldn't, with a priest around," MacMurty said.

"In any case," said Miss Alder, "we've got to find out

more about it. Let's find out why it works sometimes and not others."

"Hold it!" said Houlihan. "I've got another idea. If you'll recall, there's some spirits that can't cross water. Try wishing yourself across the East River."

"No," Miss Alder said sensibly, "give him a really tough one. Go across the ocean."

"All right, I'm going to Shannon, Ireland."

No results.

"That was a failure!" chor-tled Houlihan. "He couldn't take you across the water! Now, if my theory is correct, he can't put a curse on you and then not keep it. If he fails once, he's got to lift the curse."

"That's right!" said Miss Alder. "I remember now! If you can get him to go back on his word, he's licked! We've done it!"

MacMurty grinned. "Pour me another, Houlihan! I'll try again to make sure!" He drank the whiskey and said: "Miami, Florida! I'm going to Miami!"

Again there were no results.

"Hooray! Houlihan, you're a genius!" He shook Houlihan's hand briskly, and Houlihan refilled his glass.

Then Houlihan set two

more glasses on the table. "I'm buying this round. Is Irish too strong for you, Miss Alder?"

"I should say not! Pour away!"

MacMurty took her hand and shook it. "Thanks for your help. You're a wonderful girl, Miss Alder."

She blushed prettily.

"In a way, though," MacMurty sighed, "it's too bad. I could have seen all sorts of interesting places. Suppose I'd said I wanted to go to a Sultan's harem. I—"

Dizzy . . .

The turbanned giant who stood before MacMurty looked startled for a moment, then went for the wicked-looking scimitar that hung at his side.

"Eeeeeeeek!"

At the sound of the scream in his ear, MacMurty jerked his head around. Miss Alder was with him! He was still holding her hand!

Then he saw the glitter of a blade in the air. He ducked just in time. It sang past his ear and went *chunk!* against the tile floor.

MacMurty leaped away. Around him, he saw a confused blur of Oriental splendor and veiled women, but he was too busy with the harem

guard to pay much attention.

He couldn't wish himself away again; he couldn't desert Miss Alder. He had let go of her hand! He'd have to get her back again.

The giant eunuch was lifting the scimitar again. MacMurty's foot lashed out, kicking the blade. It skittered across the floor with a ring of steel.

It didn't seem to bother the huge giant any. He came at MacMurty swinging his huge fists. MacMurty swung at the eunuch's midsection, and it was as though his fist had struck a truck tire.

MacMurty ducked under his opponent's swing and slammed a fist into his jaw. That did it. Big as he was, the guard had a glass jaw. He looked definitely groggy. MacMurty threw another punch into his solar plexus, and this time the muscles were a good deal softer. Another blow to the jaw, and the giant toppled.

Then something hit MacMurty from behind . . .

When he woke up, his head was throbbing; it felt as though the sea were pounding against it. He shook his head dizzily and sat up. He was in a dungeon cell. It was locked tight with heavy bolts, and an armed guard stood outside glaring in.

MacMurty thought about it for a little. Then he said to himself: *I hope this works!* Aloud, he said: "I believe I'll go to wherever Miss Alder is."

His head reeled . . .

Again he was surrounded by Oriental tapestries and walls. But this time, there was a cruel-looking bearded man on a high throne. The Sultan himself, MacMurty assumed.

"Mr. MacMurty!" It was Miss Alder standing nearby. She was clad in what looked like almost nothing at all but thin, diaphanous silk. Before any of the Sultan's men could move, she had leaped into MacMurty's arms.

"Back to Murphy's!" he shouted.

Not so much dizziness now, but—

Houlihan was waiting, but this time there was a gentleman in clerical garb waiting, too. The priest looked a bit shocked at the appearance of Miss Alder, but then he sniffed the air delicately.

"Houlihan," he said after a moment, "you're right. I'm sorry I doubted you."

"This is Father Riley," Houlihan explained. "When you didn't come back for so long, I got worried and called him."

MacMurty noticed that there was no one else in the place, and the bar was closed. "How long have we been gone?"

"About three hours. I closed the bar early. I didn't want such goings-on to ruin the business."

Miss Alder, cowering behind MacMurty, said: "Can I borrow your topcoat? I look rather conspicuous in this. That horrible Sultan was going to marry me or something."

The priest raised an eyebrow at MacMurty. "Houlihan told me you wanted to see a harem. Are you satisfied?"

"Yes, Father," said MacMurty. "But tell me: How come it worked this time? Why didn't it break the spell? How could I cross water when I couldn't before?"

As MacMurty handed his topcoat to Miss Alder, Father Riley said: "Houlihan made a slight mistake. It's only supposed to be certain sprites, werewolves, or vampires that can't cross water. Besides, that's all superstition. The One with whom you're dealing isn't bothered by such trivia. If he were, every sailor would be pure at heart. Well, almost."

"Well, then, Father, can you exorcise him?"

"According to canon law, I would have to get the bishop's permission," the priest said. "You'll have to tell me all about it from the beginning."

"Just a minute, Father. He can't go into a church, can he?"

"I should think not."

"And if I get rid of him that way, he'll have no more power?"

"It's not as easy as that," said the priest. "He isn't around now; his power only operates when you ask him to—by making a wish to go somewhere."

"All right, then, I want to go to the church."

Nothing happened.

"Maybe that broke it. Let's see. I want to go to Africa."

There—

A huge yellow lion was charging straight for him. MacMurty said: "Back to Murphy's!" just as it leaped.

—And back.

"I guess that didn't work," said MacMurty. "But there's something funny going on here." He frowned and thought a moment. "Let's go over this again, like you suggested, Father."

For the second time, he told the story of the Man in Black.

Then, suddenly, he leaped

to his feet. "I think I've got it!" Without another word, he rushed to the pay phone booth, closed the door, and fed in a dime. The other three watched him dial. After half an hour and several more calls, he came triumphantly out of the booth.

"I think I've got it. There's just one more question. Father, is the door to the church open?"

"Of course, my son."

MacMurty grinned. "I thought so! Now, Father, will you help me a little. It's nothing much, but I think I've got him beaten."

"I'll help you all I can."

"Good! Then let's walk down to the church. And I want you to go inside and lock the church doors."

"But—"

"It'll only be for a few minutes, Father."

"Well—" Then a strange light glowed in the priest's eyes, "I see what you mean, MacMurty! And I think it will work!"

The four of them stood outside St. Luke's Church. The priest had securely locked all the doors.

"Here goes," said MacMurty. "I want to go inside this church!"

Nothing happened.

Then a gentleman in black strode around the corner and smiled at MacMurty — he smiled with his mouth, but there was hatred in his eyes.

"Very well, MacMurty," said the Man in Black. "You've won. Next time you may not be so lucky."

"Go!" said Father Riley.

The Man in Black turned away. "I was just leaving. Good-bye, all—for a while." And he was gone.

"I don't see how you figured it out," said Houlihan.

"Well," said MacMurty, "it was simple, really. You see, the curse was for my hating to wait. I hated to wait for any kind of transportation or wait for something to happen.

"Therefore, if I could have gotten to some place *without* waiting, or achieved my objective without waiting, the curse didn't work.

"If I just wanted to cross the room or go out in the hall, for instance, I could have walked straight there without waiting. But if I'd have had to wait—there I'd be." He turned to Miss Alder. "For instance, when I went to talk to you in the ladies' powder room, I'd have had to wait for you to come out. So there I was, inside."

"Then why," asked Miss

Alder, "didn't you go to Shannon or to Miami?"

MacMurty grinned broadly. "I checked on that, too. I called the airlines. I found that if I'd taken a cab to the airfield, I would have been able to board a plane immediately for Shannon, Ireland, or Miami, Florida.

"But the church?"

MacMurty's grin grew even broader. "When the church door was open, I could have walked right in. So his curse didn't take effect. But if the doors were *locked*, I'd have to *wait* until Father Riley unlocked them.

"Church doors are kept open nearly all the time; he didn't think I'd ever figure out his curse!"

"It only shows," Father Riley said, "that exorcism isn't really needed; a man can get rid of the Devil himself if he has the determination."

MacMurty glanced at his watch. "Good heavens! I have to get to the office! It's almost closing time! Miss Alder, you can have the rest of the day off. I'll be over to pick you up tonight; I have a very important question to ask you."

"Shall I call you a cab?" asked Houlihan.

"Call Miss Alder one, Houlihan. I'll take the subway. I don't mind waiting." **THE END**

Sex, Love, and Mr. Owen

By THORNE SMITH

Almost any red-blooded man would enjoy explaining the facts of life to a gorgeous young female. But not Mr. Owen. This lush Lorelei would not be turned aside, though, and the discussion bounced from Mr. Owen's sleeping dog to whether or not one volume of pornography was more interesting than the next.

MR. OWEN was caged behind four counters. As far as his gaze could reach, there were books and still more books. The mere thought of reading even a fraction of them numbed his literary faculties. He thought of numberless bookstore owners resorting to theft and murder

to keep from sinking in seas of bankruptcy beneath the steadily rising tide of current fiction. He thought of authors, and his heart was filled with indignation against that indefatigable, ever hopeful tribe of word vendors.

Luckily his thoughts were side-tracked by the conversa-



The girl's questions should have been asked in a bedroom—not in a bookstore.

tion of two gentlemen who were fingering various volumes in a decidedly furtive manner. One of these gentlemen was tall, hungry-looking, and artistically untidy. The other was exactly like the first only not as tall. Feeling themselves under scrutiny, the pair looked up guiltily.

"How is *The Broken Bed* going?" the tall one asked in a diffident voice.

"What?" replied Mr. Owen. "I don't sleep in a broken bed."

"No. No," said the other in tones of pain, "I was referring to Monk's latest. I don't care where you sleep."

"Nor do I care where you sleep," replied Mr. Owen tartly, "or if you ever sleep. Please stick to business. You were referring to Monk's latest what?"

"I was referring to the works of Monk," answered the tall person in the manner of a god offended.

"Oh," said Mr. Owen, momentarily stunned, "you were? Well, we don't refer to them here. You must be in the wrong department."

"Do you mean to stand there and tell me to my face," cried the man, "that you don't sell *The Broken Bed* here—not one single *Broken Bed*?"

"I'm rather new at this business myself," Mr. Owen explained, thinking it better to be patient with the man. "But I know they sell broken mechanical toys. They might even sell broken beds. Why don't you try the furniture department? If they haven't one there they might be willing to order a broken bed for you. They might even break one of their good beds. Almost anything can happen in this store."

"My dear sir," said the tall man, evidently deciding to be patient himself, "it seems you don't understand. I am referring to Monk's works."

"I know," put in Mr. Owen, "but I do wish you'd stop. We've gone far enough."

"One moment," the man continued with a wave of his hand. "This may jog your lag-gard wits. They recently made him into an omnibus."

"Who?" gasped Mr. Owen, starting back.

"Monk," replied the other triumphantly. "There! They made Monk into an omnibus."

"How could they do that?" Mr. Owen wanted to know.

"Why, they make all the best ones into omnibuses nowadays," he was told. "It's being done."

"But I don't see," answered Mr. Owen. "How could they

possibly make this chap Monk into an omnibus?"

"He became so popular," replied the other simply.

"Still I don't see it," pursued Mr. Owen. "Just because a man is popular, why should they make him into an omnibus? Doesn't it hurt terribly?"

"Why should it hurt?" exclaimed the other fiercely.

"They just take him and squeeze him together tight and compactly, and there you are."

"I know," said Mr. Owen, unable to keep the horror from his voice. "But look at him. The poor fellow must be in an awful condition. I don't even like to think of it."

"No, he isn't," replied the other, frowning dangerously. "Not if he's properly done. There you have him for all time conveniently at hand—the best of his works. The rest of him that doesn't matter you can toss aside."

Mr. Owen shivered and stared at the speaker with dilated eyes.

"Will you please go away," he said quietly. "I don't care to hear any more."

"Nonsense," spoke up the smaller of the two madmen for the first time. "They made *him* into an omnibus. He's Monk."

"Oh," said Mr. Owen, speaking gently as if to a child. "He's Monk and he's an omnibus, too. What might you be, a tram car?"

"No," the little chap replied in all seriousness, "but I hope to be an omnibus some day. You know, if they don't make you into an omnibus you're simply no good."

"I shouldn't think you'd be much good if they did," observed Mr. Owen. "Why don't you run along now and play in the Toy Department?"

"What do you think we are," cried the tall lunatic, "children?"

"Not at all," Mr. Owen said soothingly. "You're an omnibus all right. I can see that at a glance. But don't you think you'd be happier in our motor vehicle department? You might run into a Mack truck there. Wouldn't that be fun?"

Upon the reception of this suggestion the tall man uttered a loud complaint and dashed off wildly through the store, pushing and being pushed. The little chap followed him. A good-looking salesgirl sidled up to Mr. Owen and invited incredible confidences with her wickedly shadowed eyes.

"You're the new partner," she began, "aren't you? What

was troubling those two half-wits?"

"One kept telling me he was an omnibus," faltered Mr. Owen. "And when I admitted he was—called him one, in fact—he started in screaming and ran away."

The girl smiled sympathetically and patted Mr. Owen's arm.

"Don't mind them," she replied. "They're just a couple of authors. You know, they come around here and innocently ask how their books are going, and then get mad as hell because we haven't heard of them. They should tell us they're authors, in the first place. Then we could think up some comforting lie."

"But this chap insisted he was an omnibus," Mr. Owen continued. "Said they did things to his—his—I forget

now, but however it was, they did things to the best of him and then he was an omnibus."

"This is an omnibus," the girl explained, picking up a stout volume. "It's one of those quaint ideas that occasionally get the best of publishers. Whenever an author isn't good enough to have his old books bought individually and still isn't rotten enough to be taken off the list entirely they publish an omnibus volume of his stuff, and surprisingly few people ever buy it."

"Oh," said Mr. Owen. "Then I was a little wrong. He started in with asking for a broken bed."

"That's Monk's latest drip," the girl told him. "It doesn't matter, though. He didn't want to buy it. He was seeking information."

At this moment a middle-aged lady sailed up to the counter and knocked off several books which she failed to replace. The salesgirl eyed her.

"What would be nice for a young lady sick in bed?" she demanded in a scolding voice.

"How about a good dose of salts, lady?" the girl replied promptly out of the side of her mouth, and winked at the shocked Mr. Owen.

"Or a nice young man?"



chimed in another salesgirl.

"I'll have you to know this young lady comes from one of the best families," the woman retorted indignantly.

"Why did they kick her out?" Mr. Owen's companion wanted to know.

"They didn't kick her out," cried the woman.

"Then how did she get to know you?" the other girl inquired.

"Are you deliberately trying to insult me?" the woman demanded in a voice of rage.

"I was," said the girl with the shadow-stained eyes, "but I've given it up."

"I asked," said the woman, struggling to control her words and mixing them completely, "what would be nice to give to a sick book in bed?"

"A worm, lady," replied Owen's friend. "A bookworm—a nice, succulent bookworm."

"But can't you understand?" cried the woman. "I don't want worms."

"Neither do lots of other people," the girl replied philosophically, "but they can't help themselves. I didn't know you had worms."

"But I haven't any worms," said the woman.

"Then why don't you want some?" she was asked.

"Who wants worms?" snapped

the woman indignantly.

"Perhaps this woman is trying to sell you some of her worms," Mr. Owen suggested.

"That's an idea, too," agreed the girl. "Say, lady, are you trying to sell me some worms?"

"Certainly not!" expostulated the woman. "I don't want to sell some worms."

"See?" said the salesgirl with a hopeless shrug of her shoulder. "She says she won't let us have any of her worms."

"But I didn't have any worms to begin with," cried the woman.

"Oh," replied the girl, with ready understanding, "you picked them up as a hobby."

"No," declared Mr. Owen. "She means, she wasn't born with worms."

"It's a pity she was born at all," observed the salesgirl. "She and her old worms. Who brought up these worms, anyway?"

"You did," the woman told her. "I asked for a book, and you brought up worms."

"And where did the young lady in bed go?" the girl asked. "Is she still sick?"

"You told me to give her a dose of salts," the woman retorted furiously.

"Did I?" replied the salesgirl. "Well, give her a couple



of doses and worm yourself off. This is a book counter and not a worm clinic. I'm tired of you and your worms and your dying young women and all that. Besides, I want to talk to this gentleman. You're in the way. Come back tomorrow when you've made up your mind."

"The management will hear about this," the woman threatened.

"The management has heard," the girl replied. "This gentleman is one of the owners. Isn't he lovely?"

Impotent with anger the woman rushed away.

Owen looked blankly at the salesgirl.

"Is there anything wrong?" he asked her.

"Oh, no," she replied, her eyes gleaming with unholy amusement. "There's nothing at all wrong. Can't you read?" Here she pointed to an overhead sign. "That darn fool came to the Pornographic Department. Take a look at this book."

She selected a book at random, turned the pages until she found an illustration, then passed the book to Mr. Owen. He glanced at the picture, gave one frantic look about him then turned his back on the girl. The poor man's brain was paralyzed by the picture the girl had put under his nose, a picture she should not have looked at herself and which most certainly she should not have shown to him. With the book still held forgotten in his hands, Mr. Owen strove to think of other things. It was obvious to him that he was never going to turn round and face that girl again. What disturbing eyes she had! He wondered whether it would not be better for him to crouch down back of the counter and to wait there until one of the partners came to take him away. Dimly he realized that someone had been asking him a question, the same one, several times. He looked up and discovered he was being glared at by a thin, bitter-faced lady who

gave the impression of being mostly pince-nez.

"Do you have the *Sex Life of the Flea*?" the woman asked sharply.

Mr. Owen now noticed that the woman held a slip of paper and a pencil in her hands. "My God," he wondered, "is this horrid old crow trying to interview me on my sex life? What a place this is."

"No, lady," he answered disgustedly. "I don't have the sex life of a louse."

"But I must have the *Sex Life of the Flea*," the woman insisted.

"I hope you enjoy it," he retorted, "but I shall play no part in it. None whatsoever. Personally, I don't care if you have the sex life of a mink."

"I've finished with minks," snapped the woman. "I'm doing fleas now."

"Have you mistaken me for a bull flea or whatever the he's are called, by any chance?" he shot back. "Or have you gone batty like

everyone else? If you want a flea's sex life why not take up with some unmarried flea and have done with it?"

"You've gone batty yourself," retorted the woman.

"Madam," he replied, "I certainly have. Now, run away and look for this flea. I'm busy."

The woman sniffed, tossed back her head, and subjected Mr. Owen to a parting glare.

"You," she said witheringly, "would not even understand the sex life of the Bumpers — *Chloroscombrus chrysurus*."

"I doubt it," admitted Mr. Owen. "It doesn't sound very restrained."

"And as for the courtship of the Squid," she tossed in for good measure as she prepared to march away, "I know you are ignorant of that."

"I'm not alone in my darkness, madam," he told her a little nettled, "and, furthermore, I'm not a Peeping Tom."



"Will you kindly hold that book a little higher?" a fresh voice asked at his other side. "I want to study the detail of the illustration."

Mr. Owen wheeled and found himself confronting the gravely critical face of a lovely young girl. With his last shred of chivalry he endeavored to remove the book from view, but the girl hung on gamely.

"What's the matter?" she asked innocently. "Don't you want me to see it?"

"Of course not," he scolded. "I don't want anybody to see it. Can't look at it myself."

The girl took the book from his now nerveless fingers and studied the picture intently. Fully expecting her to shriek and hurry away as soon as she understood what it was all about, Mr. Owen watched with fascinated eyes.

"Those Arabian lads certainly had some quaint ideas," she observed in a casually conversational voice. "So complicated—almost too elaborate, I would say, but perhaps they had a lot of time on their hands and nothing better to do. And after all is said and done, what is there better to do?"

"Don't ask me, lady," said Mr. Owen hastily. "I wash

my hands of the whole affair."

"You seem to find something wrong with this picture," the girl went on. "Is it out of drawing?"

"It's out of reason," he answered coldly. "Please stop memorizing it."

"I don't have to memorize it," the girl replied proudly. "I'm thoroughly conversant with the technique of Arabian erotology."

"Oh," replied Mr. Owen feebly, then prompted by the belief that anything would be better than this clutchingly graphic illustration which they were shamelessly sharing between them, he asked, "would something in Squids interest you, or Bumpers, perhaps?"

The young lady judiciously considered this proposal.

"No," she said at last. "I don't think I'd get much of a kick from the erotic life of the Squid."

"Sorry," said Mr. Owen, and he really was. "Then how about something especially filthy in the line of Bumpers? That might tide you over."

"Hardly," replied the girl. "Haven't you a dirtier book than this one?"

"My dear young lady," said Mr. Owen with deep conviction, "they don't print any dirtier books than that one."

Even to be standing together in its presence makes me feel that for all practical purposes you and myself are nine tenths married."

"Does it affect you that way?" the girl inquired with professional interest.

"I don't know what way you mean," he replied cautiously. "But I do know I'll never be quite the same."

"You're too impressionable," the girl assured him. "Now, I ran across a book the other day that would have opened your eyes. It was ever so much dirtier than this—to begin with it described—"

"Don't!" cried Mr. Owen, clapping both hands to his ears. "Are you proposing to stand there in cold blood and describe to me a book even dirtier than this one?"

"Perhaps when I've finished," smiled the girl, "your blood won't be so cold."

"Oh," muttered Mr. Owen, panic stricken by the implication in the girl's words. "Oh, dear. Oh, dear. I want to get out of this department. How can I do it? Where shall I turn?"

His hands fluttered helplessly over the books, and all the time he was painfully aware of the fact that the salesgirl with those eyes was observing his distress with

quietly malicious amusement.

"Tell that creature all about it," he said to the young lady distractedly and pointed to the salesgirl. "She'll probably cap your story with the Nuptials of the Whale or Everyman's Manual of Rape, for all I know. Don't hang around here any more. I'm in no mood for any monkey business."

"Then I'll call on you when you are," the smiling young lady replied. "I like that sort of business, and it's so refreshing to find a man who is still fresh and unspoiled—you know, not blase."

"Don't you dare come back," Mr. Owen called after the girl as she gracefully swayed away. "My sex life is null and void."

Apparently the girl did not hear, but various other customers did, and stopped to stare interestedly at this man who was thus publicly proclaiming his truly lamentable condition.

"I hope you don't mean that," the salesgirl murmured, undulating up to him with her trim, flexible torso.

Mr. Owen, after recovering a little from the effect of the torso, noticed for the first time that a small section of hell had crept into her hair

and left its flames glowing among the waves. A dangerously alluring girl, he decided. She was certainly not the proper person to team up with, when selling pornographic literature. Especially when illustrated. Or maybe she was. He did not know.

"I wish you'd stop sidling up to me like an impassioned and overdone piece of spaghetti," he complained. "And what has my sex life to do with you, I'd like to know?"

"That's rather a leading question, isn't it?" she answered, a challenging glitter in her eye.

"I don't know," said Mr. Owen. "If it is, don't answer."

"I feel that I must," she told him gently.

"Oh, God!" breathed Mr. Owen.

"So far," said the girl, "our sex lives have never crossed,

but they might at any minute."

"What!" cried Mr. Owen. "You mean right here and now? Oh, no they won't, my girl. Nobody is going to cross my sex life in the middle of a department store. You keep your sex life and I'll keep mine."

"But you seem to have no sex life."

"Then don't worry about it. Let the sleeping dog lie."

"What sleeping dog?"

"Don't ask me," Mr. Owen told her bitterly. "Any sleeping dog."

"Oh," said the girl. "I thought you meant your sleeping dog."

"Well, I didn't," he retorted irritably. "I never had a dog either sleeping or awake."

For a moment she studied him appraisingly.

"Did you ever have a girl?" she asked.

THE END

The story of Cinderella is founded on fact. According to Strabo, a young Egyptian girl named Rhodopis once bathed in the Nile. The high wind carried one of her sandals to the feet of the King of Egypt, who was holding an open-air court of justice not far away. The King offered a reward for the discovery of the sandal's owner. When Rhodopis proved it was hers, the King married her. She lived some 4,000 years ago, and is remembered in history as the "Rosy-Cheeked Queen."

TIME OUT

By DARIUS JOHN GRANGER

Football coaches always advise lots of practice, plenty of sleep, and good clean living if you want to make the team. Laudable of course, but there is a more direct route to gridiron greatness. Eustice Barlow found it. And Eustice started out as far less promising material than you—or you—or you.

THE accident happened in the first scrimmage of the season. The scrimmage was open to the public, but not many people took the trouble to watch the workout from the grandstand. State College of Agricultural Techniques—called SCAT for short—wasn't going anywhere this football season, or any football season. SCAT just didn't have the manpower.

The accident changed all that, but no one knew it for a while.

"Get in there on offense, Barlow!" Coach bawled.

"Who, me?" said Barlow with good reason, since he was fourth-string quarterback when SCAT resorted to a T formation, which wasn't often.

"Yeah, you," said Coach,

not famous for his brilliant conversation. Not, in fact, famous for anything.

Eustice Barlow was, naturally, surprised. He had made the team originally due to his willing resemblance to a tackling dummy. He rarely got off the bench, though, even in scrimmages.

"Yeah, you," said Coach again as Barlow felt the seat of his pants for splinters. But the season was young, the bench was newly planed, and Barlow's football trousers were in the clear. "I want the first team should get a chance at defense, Barlow," said Coach by way of explanation. "You be the ball carrier."

"Oh," said Barlow, crestfallen. He put on his helmet, adjusting the chin strap. He weighed a hundred forty-

three pounds either wring wet or bone dry, there had never been any difference. Slender and rather long-legged for his size, he might have been a speed-merchant. Unfortunately, he was not. He was a rather unmuscular young man with nothing except a burning determination to win a letter, make something of himself at SCAT. Here in his senior year, though, he was still letterless. You had to get off the bench to win a letter.

Barlow trotted out on the field. He ran in a slightly bow-legged crouch that would have drawn snickers from the crowd in the grandstand, had there been a crowd in the grandstand. He had nothing but determination. It did not seem that determination would be enough.

Barlow took the ball. It was new, shiny, not very scuffed. It felt wonderful in Barlow's small hands. He loved the feel of the pigskin and imagined himself making an eighty-five yard kick-off return on a broken field run without interference through the entire enemy team while sixty-thousand spectators looked on in frenzied excitement.

The fourth-string center took the ball from Barlow and placed it on scrimmage. The

fourth team huddled, Barlow as quarterback calling the play. He called for the option series, which he'd seen the first team—hardly any great shakes, either, when you came to think of it—always run from T formation. Wherein the quarterback took the ball and ran parallel to the line of scrimmage. If a hole opened, he ducked through it. If no hole opened, he shoveled the ball out to the fullback, who was running behind him, in which case the fullback tried to run around end. It was a complicated play that even the first team had difficulty with.

The fourth team lined up. One thing SCAT had plenty of was manpower. Not football manpower, just plain manpower. The courses at SCAT are not very exacting and leave a good deal of free time.

Barlow called signals. He was so nervous he forgot what number the ball would be snapped on. He bent over the center's rump, hands outstretched. This was a big chance, and he knew it. A good showing and he might possibly be elevated to the third team. There was no telling where he would go from there.

Suddenly the ball was



People high in the grandstand shuddered at the bone-crushing impact.

thrust into his hands. He took it. The frail fourth-string line seemed to collapse like sticks. Barlow took one awkward step to his right and saw what he thought was a momentary hole in the jagged forward wall. He plunged into it hopefully and saw something big and shiny in front of his head.

It was a helmet. The helmet belonged to Igor Korzbrowski, SCAT's one decent lineman, a running guard who had made All State third team last year and who might have gone higher than that in statewide or national recognition had he been on a team that won an occasional football game. Korzbrowski was two hundred and fifteen pounds of recruited Pennsylvania coal-town muscle. He or anyone else was at a loss to say what, exactly, he was doing at State College of Agricultural Techniques, since his ambition in life was to complete his ROTC course at SCAT and become a career officer in the Army. At any rate, Korzbrowski, led by his helmet, strove to plug up the momentary gap in the first-string line. Through this gap Eustice Barlow was manfully plunging.

Helmet met helmet. There was a sound like dropping an unripe melon from the bell

tower above the administration building, something that high-jinx students have been known to do when Dean Thistlewaithe was passing by.

A whistle blew. Doc Spotstuck came loping out on the field, smelling of liniment or possibly good Puerto Rican rum. Korzbrowski got up with an apologetic look on his face and a dent in his helmet.

Barlow did not get up at all. They rushed him to the infirmary, where Doc Spotstuck's examination revealed a rather severe concussion . . .

Barlow came out of it on the fourth day. He didn't tell anyone he came out of it, though. He wanted to tell them, but he came out of it in a very strange way and what he saw fascinated him.

Coach and a nurse were by his bedside. Kissing. Well, not exactly kissing. Standing like two statues kissing. They did not move. They absolutely did not move. This seemed very strange to Barlow, who was a better than an average student at SCAT. It seemed even stranger that the kissing statues were not aware of his presence.

Barlow, whose head felt fine now, scrutinized the kissing statues carefully. They moved ever so slightly. Like

the second hand of a clock. Keep watching and you could see the slightest change in the position of the lips or in the look of forbidden ecstasy on the nurse's rather pretty and Coach's rather repulsive face.

Barlow did the only thing he could do under the circumstances. He got out of bed, padded to the door and down the hall. Experimentally, he entered various rooms where he encountered four or five more statues, one of them a pretty co-ed getting a wart removed from her derriere.

Spending some little time arranging the statues to suit his aesthetic sense, Barlow began to realize what the trouble was. Everybody was moving too slowly. Everybody seemed to be standing almost perfectly still. Or, Barlow moved too fast.

Experimentally, he went to the sink in the examining room in which the girl was having a wart removed from her derriere. He turned the tap on and waited. A glob of water like transparent, colorless mollasses, dropped from the tap, thick and sticky. That is, Barlow told himself, apparently thick and sticky. For, in actuality, it was Barlow's speeded up senses which made it seem so.

I wonder, he thought, could

I possibly turn it on and shut it off at will, like this water faucet? Suiting action to words, he tried. He made an effort of will. Slow down, he told himself. He thought of horses. *Whoa!* he said silently. At the same moment he realized that this strangely slowed down world was completely silent. Apparently sound waves were not attuned to his slowed down auditory receptors. Or something.

All of a sudden he heard the voice of the girl with the exposed derriere. "...n't going to hurt, is it, Dr. Spotstuck? Eee-ee-eeee!" The first part of her speech referred to the scalpel the SCAT resident physician held poised over her derriere. The second part referred to Barlow, who had apparently been invisible and who had, obviously, become visible once again. Water gushed from the tap. Dr. Spotstuck dropped his scalpel. The girl with the exposed derriere did something about the exposure. Her blush covered considerably more than her face.

"What are you doing here, Barlow?" Dr. Spotstuck asked, angrily.

"Just walking through," Barlow said.

"I know a peeping Tom

when I see one," the girl accused.

Barlow suddenly recognized her. Her name was Penelope Lewitt, she had been voted homecoming queen last year, and she was undoubtedly the prettiest co-ed studying animal husbandry at SCAT. She was also the steady girlfriend of Bigger T. Thaycum, III, president of the SCAT student body and first-string quarterback on the football squad.

"I'm going to tell Bigger," Penny threatened.

Dr. Spotstuck soothed: "Young Barlow just had a concussion, so perhaps he is not himself."

"He sure won't be himself when Bigger gets through with him," Penelope declared.

It is time, Barlow decided, to get out of here. With an effort of concentration he speeded himself up again and Dr. Spotstuck's voice faded in mid-sentence on the words, "If you think Barlow . . ." Then Barlow went back to his own room, climbed under the covers, shut off his speed-up, called for the nurse, and said he had a bad dream.

Two days later, finding nothing further wrong with him, they released Barlow from the infirmary. When he

got back to the dormitory, Bigger T. Thaycum, III, was waiting for him. Thaycum was a large crewcut young man with a loud, insolent voice, a petulant manner, and too many muscles.

"Penelope told me what you did, Barlow," he accused.

"I didn't do anything," Barlow insisted.

"That," said Bigger T. Thaycum, "is what you say."

Barlow took a deep breath and stood on tiptoes. That way, the top of his head was on a level with Thaycum's nostrils. "You are blocking the way to my dorm room, Thaycum," Barlow revealed.

"Speaking of blocks," warned Thaycum, "I'm going to knock yours off."

"Stand aside," Barlow ordered.

Thaycum laughed.

"Not only that," Barlow advised, "but I have given the matter some thought and have decided to take your position as first-string quarterback."

Thaycum laughed again.

"Get out of the way," Barlow repeated without heat.

"Make me," said Thaycum.

Barlow speeded up and threw a low block at Thaycum. Thaycum fell down like a toppled statue. Barlow rolled him to one side and slowed down.

Thaycum sat up, stood up, and lunged at Barlow. Barlow speeded up. Thaycum seemed ridiculously poised on one foot, his right hand extended in a wild swing which, had it reached Barlow's face, would have utterly demolished it. Barlow stepped in under the frozen swing, grabbed Thaycum's unresisting left arm, twisted it behind him, shoved, and sent Thaycum staggering toward the stairs. Barlow slowed down. Thaycum went down the stairs with an awful clatter. Clutching the newel post for support, he climbed doggedly to his feet, looked up at Barlow, blanched, and ran out into the night. Ten minutes later he asked Penelope to return his fraternity pin and advised her to fight her own battles.

Barlow, for his part, decided to go out in earnest for the first-string quarterback's position. His fight with Bigger T. Thaycum revealed exactly how he might do this. Obviously, he could not remain speeded up all the time, for then no one would see him. He must alternately go fast and slow, fast and slow, like a neon sign. He would be the greatest broken field runner since and/or including Red Grange.

He wondered about his wild power and decided it had something to do with his brain concussion. Two-thirds of the human brain, he had learned in anatomy, is unused. Perhaps latent in that two-thirds was the power of a superman. Barlow's speed-up ability was just one aspect of this, and had somehow been jiggled into working order by the concussion.

Next day before practice he saw Coach. He was careful to keep himself slowed down.

"I want to make first-string quarter, Coach," he explained.

"I got my own problems," Coach said.

"I know I can do it," Barlow insisted.

"I oughter rest you permanently on account of your accident," declaimed Coach.

"But you ought to give me at least one chance to prove myself," Barlow cajoled.

"I got my own problems," Coach repeated. "Bigger Thaycum got hit by a truck last night. His understudy got kicked off of the team on account of bad grades. That makes you number two quarter, Barlow. *If* you can play."

"I can play, I think," Barlow understated.

Just then the nurse appeared in the grandstand. She waved.

"Is she nuts 'r something?" Coach said under his breath.

I'll bet she's married, Barlow thought as he waved back. Obviously the wave wasn't meant for him, but it got Coach off the hook in front of the rest of the team. Barlow winked knowingly at Coach, whose face got the color of an over-ripe beef tomato.

"Let me go out there and show you, Coach," Barlow suggested.

"That," agreed Coach, secretly hoping Barlow would receive another concussion, "is exactly what I was thinking."

Barlow trotted happily over to the second team. Coach called over the first-string line. "We got to show that guy," he explained. "Smash him, men. Do again what you did before, Igor."

"It was an accident, Coach," said Igor, as the Coach had told him to say to the Trustees when he was questioned about the injury.

Coach grumbled. The first-string line stormed into defensive positions. Battered and bandaged, Bigger Thaycum waved doubtful encouragement from the grandstand. The second-string center snapped the ball back to

Barlow. Barlow seemed to disappear. Everyone gasped. Barlow seemed to appear again. Everyone hollered. Barlow seemed to disappear again, meanwhile making considerable headway toward the goal line. Barlow seemed to appear again. The varsity thundered after him. Barlow snapped off. The varsity stopped. Barlow snapped on. The varsity closed in on him. Barlow vanished. The varsity milled about. Barlow reappeared, beaming and refreshed looking, behind the goal line.

"That wuz wunnerful!" squawked Coach. And, in its own way, it was.

Penny Lewitt, who had affected a tentative reconciliation with Bigger Thaycum, moved several tiers away from him in the grandstand and smiled down on Barlow.

"Eustice!" she called. "Oh, Eustice!" And blew a kiss down at him.

From that moment on, Barlow had the first-string quarterback's job all his own. From that moment on, State College of Agricultural Techniques became a national grid-iron power. Barlow on offense could not be stopped. Barlow on defense was the bane of enemy runners and would-be pass receivers. He could, nat-

urally, break up the enemy's running plays effortlessly by slipping too fast to be seen through the interference and nailing the ball carrier for a loss. He could break up the enemy's passing plays by speeding up and intercepting every pass thrown. And, naturally, every time he got his hands on the ball, whether initially on the offense or the defense, he scored a touchdown.

Newspapermen began to call him the Neon Ghost, for the way he seemed to flick on and off as he scored his touchdowns. In reality, time was actually stopping or at least slowing down for him in fits and starts, but of course they did not know this.

In its first game of the season, SCAT defeated Downstate Teacher's College, 126-0. Barlow, scoring every touchdown and setting a new single season NCAA scoring record in one game, did not even work up a good sweat.

The following Saturday, SCAT defeated State U.'s Eastern Gap Agricultural Division, 152-0, and a week later drubbed the University of Lower Platsville, 198-0. Speeding up and slowing down at an ever accelerating rate, Barlow scored every touchdown and ran every

point after touchdown from scrimmage instead of kicking it. In SCAT's first three games Barlow scored more points than any collegiate football player had ever scored in four years of NCAA competition. He made banner headlines all over the country and even got a two-column spread on the front page of the *New York Times*. His picture was hastily taken, then its likeness reproduced in oils, for appearance on the cover of *Time Magazine*. He was rushed by SCAT's seven fraternities and was the first man to join all seven at once, bouncing from initiation to initiation with undreamed-of speed.

He gave all seven fraternity pins to Penny Lewitt. SCAT's other football lettermen meanwhile, had a season-long vacation. There was no reason for them to remain in training. They only had to go through the motions. The Neon Ghost, as he was affectionately called, did the rest.

Then came SCAT's big game with M.S.U. itself. Last year M.S.U. had been voted the nation's outstanding football team in the Associated Press poll. It had gone undefeated in nine games. It had clobbered the Pacific

Coast champion in the Rose Bowl, 21-0. It had gone through its first three games without a blemish, but of course not as impressively as SCAT had. The newspapers said M.S.U. faced the cream of the nation's gridiron talent, while SCAT's schedule was not exactly loaded with talented opposition. The sports pundits wrote long columns debating whether or not the Neon Ghost would be a standout when facing M.S.U.'s line, which averaged 240 pounds and was anchored by All-American center Milo Milolovich, who tipped the beam at an even 276, and wore that number proudly on his jersey to prove it. Last year, the pundits also pointed out, M.S.U. had defeated SCAT, 55-0. They established M.S.U. as a one-point favorite while the whole sports-minded nation awaited the outcome of the game breathlessly.

On the eve of the big game, Bigger T. Thaycum knocked on the door of Barlow's dormitory room and waited there with a .45 automatic in his hand. Barlow opened the door and Thaycum poked the muzzle of the gun at his ear. "This is very embarrassing," Thaycum said by way of explanation, "but you see—"

"I have to get my sleep,"

Barlow said with an indifferent yawn. The gun meant nothing to him. He knew he would be able to dodge the bullets. He started to close the door.

"Wait!" hissed Thaycum in a furious whisper. "In case you get any ideas of pulling that on-again off-again act, I thought I should let you know that we have Penelope."

Barlow opened the door. "Come in," he said.

Thaycum and his gun went inside. Barlow closed the door. "As I was saying," Thaycum went on in obvious embarrassment, "as you probably know, my father, Bigger T. Thaycum, II, is a big promoter."

"So I have heard," admitted Barlow reluctantly.

"My father," went on Thaycum, "the big promoter Bigger T. Thaycum, II, after whom I am named, as you may know, has placed a bet of seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars on M.S.U. If they lose he is ruined. Therefore we have kidnapped Penelope to assure you also will come willingly. We have an airplane waiting. Since Penelope is in our clutches, and I assure you we are quite ruthless, may I put this gun away?"

"You may," said Barlow despondently.

They went outside, where a surplus DC-3 was waiting, a discreet pilot at the controls. Moments later they were winging across the countryside toward a Midwestern city several hundred miles from SCAT stadium, where Penelope had been taken.

Early the following morning, sleepless and distraught, Barlow was delivered to Bigger Thaycum, II, and his associates. Bigger Thaycum, III, was a man of his word: for there, unharmed, was Penelope Lewitt. Our hero embraced her, but she cried bitterly and could not be consoled. "To think," she wailed, "it is because of me that State College of Agricultural Techniques will tumble from the ranks of the unbeaten."

Barlow said nothing. There was nothing to say.

They were given breakfast. They rested. Barlow could not sleep. Thaycum the Elder paced the room impatiently, waiting for the game to begin. Thaycum the Younger had returned to campus to place a few bets of his own. Thaycum the Elder's associates were all armed to the teeth.

At last the big TV screen

lit up with the pre-game activities. Then, in an agony of suspense, Barlow watched the game get underway. The announcer reported, *sotto voce*, that the Neon Ghost, Eustice Barlow, had not showed up. SCAT would not have a chance without its great scat-back, the announcer said.

He was right. At the end of three quarters, M.S.U. had rolled up quite effortlessly, a 42-0 lead. Bigger Thaycum, II, soon to be three-quarters of a million dollars richer, beamed from ear to ear. "That kid of mine," he told everybody. "A real chip off the old block. Yes, sir."

He and his associates were so busy watching the beginning of the final period of play on the big twenty-six inch TV screen, that they did not see Barlow blink off. Speeded up and therefore invisible, Barlow took Penelope in his arms. She blurred and disappeared too.

"Hey, what the!" one of Thaycum's associates cried colorfully.

But Barlow was already outside with a delightedly screaming Penny. They flashed away across the countryside as fast as Barlow could run, which was very fast indeed.

Moments later they had

covered the several hundred miles to SCAT stadium. Barlow flew to the locker room, changed into his football togs, sprinted up the ramp, and slowed up in front of Coach, pacing abjectly before the bench.

"Barlow!" mumbled Coach, and fainted.

The assistant coach sent Barlow into the game. The score was now 49-0 with ten minutes to play. Barlow went blurry. Barlow blinked on and off: The partisan SCAT crowd, given nothing to shout over till now, really let off steam. Barlow got his hands on the ball. Barlow scored. M.S.U. received the ball. On the first play from scrimmage Barlow blinked off, rushed with tremendous speed and thorough invisibility through the M.S.U. line, made the tail-back fumble, recovered the fumble, and ran, neoning, for another touchdown. M.S.U. kicked off. Barlow ran the kick-off back 93 yards for a touchdown. Another kick-off. Another fumble, a Barlow recovery, and a SCAT score. In not many minutes the score was knotted at 49-all. But there were not many minutes left in the game; it might actually end in a tie.

M.S.U. fumbled on its own, nervously, after the kick-off

following the knotted score. Barlow recovered and began to run. He tried to blink off. Something went wrong. He could not speed up properly. He told himself he had run himself out on his sprint back to SCAT campus from the Midwestern city. Apparently his physical derangement had only been temporary. He thought of this objectively for two seconds and then was tackled. He managed to hold the ball, but was swamped by seven M.S.U. players.

It was the first time Barlow had been downed all season long. The screaming crowd lapsed into stunned silence. Several fans of the fair sex, Mrs. Thistlewaithe among them, were carried from the grandstand in dead faints.

Barlow ran again. And was thrown for a six-yard loss by Milo Milolovich, grinning devilishly. On second down he was thrown for another loss. On third down he tried a pass. It was the first pass he had thrown all season and it was almost intercepted.

On fourth down, with twenty yards to first down, sixty yards to a touchdown, and twenty seconds to play, and the score tied at 49-49, Barlow called in desperation for the T-formation option

play. He was battered and bruised and had already decided in advance to shovel the ball back to the fullback and settle for a tie. But then he saw Penelope, who was no longer crying, waving to him from the stands. On her shapely breast the seven fraternity pins gleamed.

Barlow gulped. He called signals and felt the snap of the pigskin. He began to run. M.S.U.'s defenders hung back warily, expecting the famous neon routine, expecting the Ghost to live up to his name, thinking, probably, that he had been cat-and-mousing them for a few plays. Barlow found his hole in the reluctant line. He plunged through. Hands clawed at him. His jersey was ripped to shreds. He kept running. The defenders backed off warily. One of them closed in. Barlow gave him the stiff arm, and he tumbled away. Barlow kept going. Another defender. Another stiff-arm. No blinking on and off. Just good broken-field running.

The crowd roared. More

than it ever had before, quite possibly, because now they actually saw Barlow. And Barlow, to his amazement, discovered that he had learned how to run.

He crossed the goal-line just as the final gun went off. SCAT won the game, 55-49.

SCAT went on to an undefeated season, sparked by a fully normal Eustice Barlow. They did not win by such lopsided scores, but they won. Bigger Thaycum, II, now broke, shot himself with his son's gun. Bigger III, penniless, was forced to leave school and go out to work for the first time in his life.

When he graduated and was unanimously nominated to the first-string All-American quarterback post by every sports writer in the country, Barlow married Penelope and wrote his memoirs. The latter, revealing what had really happened to him, were even more astonishing than the reincarnation craze, and Barlow made a fortune on them.

THE END

Tobacco has been named "the herb of peace." Adherents to this belief point out that the easiest-tempered and most tractable women are those of the Orient, who smoke all day long.



THE MAN WITH THE X-RAY EYES



advantages—no risks involved.

THE MAN WITH THE X-RAY EYES

By LEONARD G. SPENCER

You were too close when a bomb went off. You land in a hospital—and your nurse walks in completely nude! Then you realize what's happened—you have X-ray eyes. So how are you going to use this strange gift? Spend all your time ogling the gals? Not by a long shot. It's good fun, but you want to make a buck so you head for Las Vegas as fast as you can get your pants on. But does fame and fortune follow? Read the story of what happened to you and find out.

ARTHUR TURPIN was the part of Exercise Q-Bomb which the public never heard about.

The Army brought him in for medical examination after the explosion of the first Q-Bomb at Desert Rock, Nevada, a location which has been aptly described as a wonderful place to throw old razor blades and, therefore, a wonderful place for super-bomb experiments. He was a slightly bewildered young man who seemed to be in perfect physical shape. The exhaustive medical tests confirmed this, the military brass scratched its collective

head, and Arthur Turpin, who should have been dead from radiation poisoning, was prepared for discharge from the emergency medical center in Desert Rock.

"I could have saved those doctors all that trouble," Arthur told his nurse on the eve of his departure. "I knew there wasn't a thing wrong with me."

The nurse, Lieutenant Alice Davenport, shook her head and said, "You're a very lucky young man. You were close enough to Ground Zero to absorb enough radiation to kill a regiment."

Arthur shrugged. He'd be-

gun to enjoy his brief role as a medical curiosity. "Couldn't help it," he beamed. "I was delivering a plane-load of orchids from Yucatan to the Golden Heron Hotel in Las Vegas, when—"

"I know the story," Nurse Davenport said. "Your plane came down with engine trouble."

"Sure. How was I to know I was smack dab in the middle of a superbomb test?"

Nurse Davenport leaned over Arthur's bed. "Just one more thermometer, Arthur. They insist on that."

Arthur shrugged again. The late afternoon sun, slanting in through the window, highlighted the gold in Alice Davenport's hair. The crisply starched nurse's uniform swelled and curved toward Arthur. The thermometer was thrust toward his mouth. With looks like that, he thought, she ought to be in one of those supper clubs over in Las Vegas. She ought . . .

Arthur gaped.

He almost swallowed the thermometer.

Nurse Davenport's crisp nurse's whites shimmered—and vanished. The rest of the hospital room was perfectly intact: the two chairs, the

other bed, the screen, the door to the bathroom, and the partially ajar closet door. But Alice Davenport apparently leaned over his bed wearing nothing but pink undergarments and Nevada-desert-sun-tanned skin. Then the pink dissolved, shimmering, and two strips of almost shocking white crossed Alice's firm, lovely, tanned body.

Too stunned for any reaction but the most obvious one, Arthur reached up and touched her to confirm or deny the sudden disappearance of her clothing. What he felt was the starched smoothness of the now unseen nurse's whites. Alice wasn't naked at all. She only looked naked.

She also looked furious. "You—you pinched me!"

"Amazing," Arthur said.

"And stop looking at me like that. As if I—as if I, well, you know, like it says in all the mystery novels. 'He undressed her with his eyes.'"

"Yes," Arthur said. "Yes, indeed."

"And don't talk with a thermometer in your mouth."

"But I've got to tell you! I did it with my eyes! I must have, because it feels like you're wearing—"

"I told you to stop that!" Alice slapped his face. The thermometer fell out of his mouth. Alice poked it back in so hard it almost disappeared. "Now keep still."

"I'll prove it to you," Arthur said.

"You'll prove what to me?"

"That I can feel what you're wearing but can't see it."

"Wh-what did you say?"

"You're wearing pink—well, you know. There's a monogram on the—the bottom part. Right?"

Alice's face looked like a boiled lobster. But an astounded boiled lobster.

"Furthermore," said Arthur with a momentary scientific detachment that surprised him, "you have a small, rather attractive mole directly below your left—uh, on the left side of your torso near the ribs."

Alice slapped his face again, and removed the thermometer. "Aha! You have a fever. I knew it. You're delirious."

Arthur leered. He couldn't help it. "Who wouldn't run a fever at a time like this?"

"Well, it isn't much of a fever," Alice admitted. "Then you must have been spying in

the nurse's dorms. You peeping Tom!"

"They never let me out of this room except for tests and you know it."

"Then you can actually see through—what I'm wearing?"

Arthur nodded contentedly.

"Don't just lie there. Shut your eyes!"

Arthur smiled dreamily.

Alice whipped the sheet off the unoccupied bed and draped it, cloakwise, about her shoulders. "It's no use," Arthur said, beaming, "I can see through that too. I guess you better go and tell the brass hats. They were looking for something peculiar to happen to me, weren't they?"

Wincing but dutiful, Alice said: "Please locate and describe that mole again."

Arthur did so. Alice flushed, going through lobster to boiled beet. Arthur had always wondered where a pretty blonde girl's blushes started from. Now he had the facts.

"I'll be right back," Alice said, and swished angrily from the room.

She was gone an hour and a half. The sun had set, Arthur had supped on standard Army fare and had been told to dress in his street

clothing. The night nurse—a middle-aged, stiff-backed, hatchet-faced spinster whom Arthur secretly called The Bayonet—came on duty.

"Have to admit you've been a good patient," The Bayonet rasped.

Arthur said nothing. He hoped his new gift would not manifest itself now, with The Bayonet as a specimen. It did not.

"We'll miss you here," The Bayonet said. "Like a well-behaved patient. Goodness knows they're rare in the Army."

Just then Alice came back. Over her nurse's whites she wore a heavy cardigan sweater buttoned to the neck. "Does this help?" she asked, standing with her hands and arms arranged awkwardly in front of her body.

"Does what help?" The Bayonet asked.

"Nothing," Alice said.

Arthur smiled non-committally, and said nothing. He was enjoying this, even though he now saw Alice exactly as The Bayonet saw her, fully clothed. "What did they say?" Arthur finally asked.

"I told them you had—well, you know—"

"X-ray eyes?"

"Yes. X-ray eyes, that's what I said."

"What did you say?" The Bayonet asked.

Arthur scowled. "Are they going to keep me here for more tests?" he asked glumly.

Alice bit her lip, shook her head, and managed to look very unhappy. "Far from it," she said. "You're free to go."

"But—"

Alice's big blue eyes filled with tears of indignation. "They don't believe me!"

"But you told them the truth!"

"They said I'd been working too hard. Eight months without a leave. Much too hard. They drew up leave papers for me. I'm on leave right now."

"Well, the way I see it," Arthur said cheerfully, "I've earned a little vacation myself. Besides, I have to collect on that planeload of orchids. It's less than eighty miles to Las Vegas. Want to join me?"

"I don't know what I want. I want to think. Please leave me alone."

"Don't bite my head off," Arthur said. "After all it isn't my fault, is it?"

"Of course it's your fault. If you didn't have those X-

ray eyes and if I hadn't gone and told the truth without thinking, I was up for promotion to captain. Now I'm sure they're going to pass over me. And all on account of your darned X-ray eyes!"

"You two," said The Bayonet coldly, "are a couple of refugees from Section Eight."

Ignoring her, Arthur said: "Sure you won't join me in Vegas?"

But Alice ran from the room crying.

Disappointed but looking forward to his week-end in Las Vegas, Arthur said goodbye to The Bayonet and headed for the administration wing of the hospital—and freedom. He met Alice in the hallway. She'd been crying, but she sniffled and said angrily: "Besides, what do *you* have to go to Las Vegas for? The girls in the nightclubs there are already undressed, aren't they? What's in it for you, you—X-ray eyed Cassanova?"

Deciding that he would understand his X-ray vision a lot sooner than he would understand women, Arthur left the hospital and began to walk toward Las Vegas on State 91. A Caddy with California plates and a platinum blonde at the wheel

who looked as phoney as a fifteen-dollar-bill stopped to pick him up . . .

The sign said: *YOU ARE NOW ENTERING THE INCORPORATED TOWNSHIP OF PARADISE A.*

"Paradise A?" Arthur asked the synthetic blonde. They had seen the neon of Las Vegas' famous Strip for miles across the Nevada desert through the clear, cool night air. "What's Paradise A?"

"Ain't you ever been in Vegas before?" the synthetic blonde asked in disbelief.

"No," said Arthur, "I was delivering a planeload of Central American orchids to the Golden Heron, and—"

"Golden Heron, honey? Ain't that wonderful? I'm going to the Heron myself. It's down the road a way in Paradise B."

"Yes," said Arthur. "Tell me about these Paradises?"

"Aw, I never understood so good. They save taxes that way — incorporating. Well, here we are, Daddy."

They turned off the road and rolled to a smooth stop in front of a gold sandstone building just a little smaller than the Empire State Building lying on its side and with more glittering glass than

the Corning Works could turn out with night-shifts.

"Good evening, Miss Cynthia," the braided, brassed and be-medaled doorman greeted. On closer examination, Arthur discerned that the medals were ten-dollar gold pieces.

"Hiya, Daddy," Miss Cynthia said. The doorman looked pained.

Miss Cynthia turned to Arthur with a smile that showed even white teeth. "Maybe I'll see ya inside, Daddy," she said.

Just then Arthur's trick vision asserted itself. His eyes widened. He sighed. For all her apparent equipment, Miss Cynthia was decidedly flat-chested, but it was nice to learn—first-hand, as it were—how it was done.

"Wacha staring at?" Miss Cynthia asked.

"Absolutely nothing," Arthur said truthfully.

The gleaming glass door swung open for them, Miss Cynthia undulating off in one direction, toward the Club Heron; Arthur in another, toward the manager's office.

An efficient-looking receptionist in a man-tailored suit, horn-rimmed glasses,

and a voice that would freeze a lava-flow sat at a modernistic desk before a closed door which bore the legend: *MR. CHESTER MORNY, MGR.* "There was something?" the receptionist asked.

"Mr. Morny, please. Mr. Arthur Turpin calling."

"You have an appointment?"

"I'm four days late, but it wasn't my fault."

"Was it Mr. Morny's fault?" the receptionist asked coldly.

"Let's just say it was an unavoidable delay."

The receptionist's mouth opened a quarter inch. "Say, aren't you the wilted orchid man?"

"What do you mean, wilted? I flew those orchids in, under refrigeration, from Yucatan. The bill comes to ten thousand dollars, even. I've come to collect."

"Ten thousand dollars for a planeload of wilted orchids? Mr. Morny was very mad. You ought to just go away."

"I'll see Mr. Morny, please."

The receptionist studied her carmined fingernails. "I'm terribly sorry, Mr. Turpin. Mr. Morny isn't in."

Arthur looked at the mas-

sive oak door. He was getting the hang of his X-ray vision now. It was like holding your breath optically. You held your breath optically and things dissolved. Like the massive oak door. The office behind it was enormous, with a carpet that looked as if it needed mowing, glass-and-teakwood furniture, and a man sitting at a desk against the far wall counting money. There seemed to be a great deal of money and the man appeared to get a great deal of pleasure from counting it.

"He's in there, all right," Arthur said. "He's sitting at his desk, counting money. It's more money than I ever saw in my life. If he just left the small change for me, it would probably cover my bill."

The receptionist's mouth opened a full half inch. In lesser women that would be the equivalent of a dead faint. "But how did you ever—I mean, I said Mr. Morny was definitely not in, to you or to anyone. Good evening, Mr. Turpin."

Arthur should have been angry, but he was more interested, at the moment, in his X-ray eyes. He'd really got the hang of them now. He stared at the receptionist

and made her man-tailored suit dissolve. The receptionist's man-tailored suit covered a boyish figure. There was nothing there for Arthur—or anyone who'd seen Alice Davenport. But there was ten thousand dollars coming to him—and a kind of wild talent with which to earn them.

"I'll be across the lobby in the Club Heron if Mr. Morny changes his mind," Arthur said.

"He won't change his mind."

Arthur grinned. "You never know," he said, and went across the lobby to the Golden Heron's big gambling room. A good place to pass the time while waiting.

It was straight out of a Hollywood Cinemascope, Stereophonic musical—or maybe, for once, Hollywood had borrowed its ideas from Las Vegas and not the other way around. It was glitter and bright lights and expensively-dressed gamblers and stone-faced, bored-voiced croupiers, and black-jack and craps and roulette and chuck-a-luck and big green felt-covered poker tables in back. It was noise and confusion and the sudden tensions and abrupt silences of fortunes

being exchanged at the drop of a card.

Arthur found a table at which they were dealing draw poker, jacks or better. He used the five hundred dollars he'd been holding to pay for the repair of his single-engined airplane and bought chips. He lost four hundred in the first four pots, and except for the remaining hundred in chips, did not even have carfare back to Desert Rock.

Then he thought: *What's the matter with me? I've forgotten all about my eyes.*

He folded from the next pot when he saw, through the backs of the cards, a flush in hearts facing him across the table. In the following pot he was dealt two tens and two sevens and drew a third ten. A man across the table had also drawn a full house, with trip-nines. The man placed a cautious bet, expecting a raise, but there wasn't any other power at the table. Arthur called the small bet with his remaining money, and won the pot. His X-ray eyes told him to drop out of the next three after the ante, but he won the fourth with three sixes. He now had a base of sixteen hundred dollars with which to work. Half an hour later

he'd won fourteen thousand dollars.

He began to feel guilty. It wasn't house-money: there was only one house-player in the game. Still, he thought, a man could make a fortune like this. Las Vegas, then the Haitian gambling casinos, then Cuba, finally Monte Carlo. Why feel guilty? Why stop? A man came to the poker table with whatever talents he had, didn't he? Arthur wasn't cheating. He simply had more talents than anyone else. He had X-ray eyes.

There was a pause in the play. The house-player got up, excusing himself. Another house-player took his place. It was the synthetic blonde, Miss Cynthia.

"Well, hello, there, Daddy," she greeted. "I see ya doing all right."

"Pretty good," Arthur said.

Miss Cynthia, who didn't seem to have a brain in her head, had plenty of brains for poker. Before long the other players had drifted away one by one and a large crowd—perhaps half the people in the casino—had come to watch Arthur and Miss Cynthia match poker faces. The pile of chips before Arthur had now lost all

meaning to him. The blues alone were worth over a hundred thousand dollars . . .

"How many?" Miss Cynthia said.

Arthur had a pair of Jacks. "I'll take three." This was after the initial betting. Miss Cynthia had bet five thousand dollars, house-money, and Arthur had called her.

"I'll play these," Miss Cynthia said after giving Arthur his three cards. He drew a ten, a seven, and a king. He looked at the backs of Miss Cynthia's pat hand as she repeated her five-thousand-dollar bet. She had a three, a seven, an eight, a king and a queen. The suits were not identical. She had made a ten-thousand-dollar bluff and she was so very good at it that ordinarily it would have worked. With Arthur, of course, it could not. He called her five thousand, and bumped five. Miss Cynthia raised one eyebrow, lit a cigarette, smiled, shrugged, and folded her hand. Arthur pulled the money as a collective sigh went up around the table.

"Guy's got nerves of ice," someone said.

"Ice water in his veins, you mean," another man answered.

Someone tapped Arthur's shoulder as the next hand was dealt. He craned his neck, forgetting to disconnect the X-ray vision. He recognized the tiny mole on the otherwise flawless skin. He grinned in surprise and delight and looked up at her face for the confirmation he didn't really need. It was Alice Davenport, looking very lovely in—or out—of civilian clothes.

"Well, hello there," Arthur said.

Smiling, Alice bent down and whispered in his ear. But there was no smile in her voice. "Do you realize what you're doing? You're cheating. Morally if not any other way."

"Oh, yes? They owe me ten thousand dollars!"

"Sure, but with what you've got in front of you, you could use ten-thousand-dollar-bills for cigarette lighters."

Arthur beamed. "It's a nice thought, isn't it?"

"Can you open?" Miss Cynthia asked.

Arthur fanned his cards with little concern, studying them. Then, suddenly, he hoped the expression didn't show on his face. He'd drawn his first spectacular

hand of the evening. Four—count them—Aces. Alice gaped.

"Stop that," Arthur whispered. "And how'd you find me?"

"Who said I came looking for you?"

"Well, didn't you?"

"I—I guess so. I wanted to see what would happen to you. I felt responsible because they wouldn't believe me at the hospital."

"Responsible? What could possibly happen to me? And you still haven't answered my question."

"Oh, that. You talked about a man at the Golden Heron who owed you ten thousand dollars for your planeload of Central American orchids. It was obvious you'd come here."

"Can you open?" Miss Cynthia repeated.

"Oh," Arthur said off-handedly, "I guess so. Say, twenty thousand dollars?"

Oo's and ah's floated up from around the table. Arthur tossed a handful of blue chips to the center and Miss Cynthia counted hers out carefully. "Wouldn't be trying to bluff right back at little old me, Daddy, would you?" she demanded.

"Who," said Arthur, "me?"

Alice whispered: "I still say that morally you have no right—"

"O.K.," Arthur beamed at her. "I'll play this one without you-know-what. Promise."

"Really?"

"Yes," said Arthur.

Alice looked at his fanned cards again and whispered, "Big deal. How can you lose?"

"Cards," Miss Cynthia said.

"I guess I'll play these," Arthur told her.

"One to the dealer," said Miss Cynthia, unperturbed. She discarded and drew the top card from the deck. Arthur had an impulse to read it through the back, but fought it down. After all, he'd promised, hadn't he? Besides, the chances of Miss Cynthia drawing to beat four aces were astronomical.

"Well?" Miss Cynthia said after a while.

"Twenty more," Arthur said. He meant twenty thousand, and everyone knew it. Everyone watched and waited, hardly breathing. Even the croupiers at the deserted roulette wheels came over to watch.

"Let's say your twenty, and twenty better," Miss Cynthia told him quietly.

With meticulous care, Arthur got a cigarette going, inhaled, blew smoke, studied the table through it. He fought down an impulse to use his X-ray vision.

"You promised," Alice said triumphantly.

"Yeah," Arthur admitted. "I promised." What was the difference? he asked himself. He was sweating for noth-

ing. Say Miss Cynthia held two pair. Say she was lucky and drew a full house. Arthur's four aces still would beat her. Or say she'd also drawn four of a kind pat—unlikely as it was—and had called for one card to throw him off. Whatever four of a kind she had couldn't beat his four aces. Or say she'd held four cards to a straight or



He found it difficult to keep his eyes off the girl who was following the male pedestrian.

a flush and had filled it. She still lost, didn't she? The only hand that could beat his was a straight flush, and who ever heard of a straight flush *and* four aces in the same draw.

"I'll call your raise," Arthur said slowly, "and bump you back twenty thousand more."

Miss Cynthia grunted, called him Daddy, and raised again. "You promised," Alice said once more.

Everyone thought she was telling Arthur he'd promised to bump Miss Cynthia back. He did so. And so did Miss Cynthia. Soon the mound of chips at the center of the table was enormous. By the time Miss Cynthia contented herself with just calling him, Arthur had very few chips remaining in front of him.

He unfolded his hand dramatically and said, "Four bulls." He began to rake in the money.

"Read 'em and weep," a man behind him said. "Read and weep, house gal!"

Miss Cynthia smiled her canine-tooth smile for the first time at the table. "I'm sorry for you, Daddy," she said in a voice which told everyone she was really not sorry at all, "but you'd bet-

ter put your little old hands back in your pocket or wherever you keep them." She dropped her cards face up on the table.

There was a stunned silence, then groans of sympathy for Arthur. The near-impossible had happened. Miss Cynthia had drawn a single card in the face of Arthur's four Aces and had filled a straight flush, Queen high, with it. She was the winner.

"I—I'm sorry," Alice said. "But I guess maybe it serves you right."

Arthur counted his chips disconsolately. He had a little more than seven thousand dollars left. "Not quitting, are you?" he asked Miss Cynthia.

"Not if you aren't, Daddy." The crowd settled back expectantly.

At that moment a huge man in a monkey suit drifted over to the table with the receptionist in the man-tailed suit. "That's him, Otto," the receptionist said in her icy voice. "I'm sure of it. Arthur Turpin."

Otto wrapped fingers as big as salamis around Arthur's elbow. "I'm sorry, folks," he said in a surprisingly mild and cultured voice, "but this gentleman is

all finished playing for the moment. Will you come with me, sir?"

"I don't see any reason why I should," Arthur protested.

"You're sure, Louise?" Otto asked the receptionist.

"Positive," Louise said.

"Boss wants to see you, Jack," Otto said, the cultured smoothness fading from his voice and leaving more than a suggestion of menace.

"He been cheating?" one of the previous losers at the poker game demanded almost gleefully. "Might a known it."

"Didn't say a thing about cheating, folks," Otto said. "Everything's going to be fine. Just fine. Go right ahead playing as if nothing happened." He whispered so only Arthur could hear: "You coming without trouble, Jack, or do I break your arm off and let you carry it back to Mr. Morny's office? How about it?"

"I'll go with you," said Arthur, deciding that the big man could probably do just that.

"Listen, please!" Alice cried earnestly. "If he's in some kind of trouble because of what he's done, it's probably my fault. I'm a nurse.

I'm—his nurse. I can explain everything. May I come too?"

"Sister," said Otto, "if you can explain everything then you got no choice. You don't have to ask. You just come along with us, and no fuss, huh?"

Arthur stood up. Otto's free hand took Alice's elbow, and the big man steered them both away from the poker table. Several patrons who'd wanted to play for stakes considerably smaller than those Arthur had been playing for, immediately sat down at the table. Miss Cynthia dealt as if nothing had happened.

Chester Morny was a trim little man with a moustache and a Nevada suntan and hard cold eyes as expressive as agates. His hair was rumpled. So was his tuxedo jacket. "You're Arthur Turpin?" he asked.

"Yes," said Arthur, "I am. And if you're Chester Morny, you owe me ten thousand dollars."

"You want I should hit him, boss?" Otto asked.

Chester Morny shook his head and said: "Louise, will you please repeat what Mr. Turpin told you."

"He said you were in the office counting money, chief."

Chester Morny nodded. "Could he possibly have known that?"

"No, sir. Only you and Otto and I know that Friday night's your time for recording the weekly gross. Only the armored truck driver and guard—"

"But there weren't any," Chester Morny said coolly. "That is, they were a phoney driver and a phoney guard, Mr. Turpin. Your confederates, may I suggest?"

"My confederates?"

"Yes, Mr. Turpin. It's pretty clear that you used the planeload of orchids as a front, as an excuse to get in here and—"

"That's absolutely ridiculous!"

"—as they say, case the joint."

"I never did any such thing."

"No?" Louise asked sweetly. "Then how did you know Mr. Morny was in there counting the money? Can you tell us that?"

"You're darned right I can," Arthur said hotly. "I can see through walls and doors and things, that's how."

"He can see through walls and doors and things," Morny said dryly.

"You want I should hit

him, boss?" Otto asked, more hopefully this time.

"I will let you know," Morny told the eager henchman, "when such a possibility interests me." He turned smiling to Arthur. "Now surely, Mr. Turpin, you can't expect me to believe that."

Arthur scanned the room quickly, nervously. On the wall behind the desk was a picture showing the facade of the Gold Heron in full color. Behind the picture with his X-ray vision Arthur saw a safe. "I'll prove it to you," he said. "Your safe is—" he pointed dramatically at the picture—"over there."

"That doesn't prove a thing," Louise sneered. "Can you think of a better place for a safe?"

"Wait a minute," Arthur said. "I'm not finished. In the safe is—let me see—a manilla envelope containing IOU's written by several prominent people, some jewelry, and a file drawer of letters."

Arthur stepped back, turned away from the picture, and stared triumphantly at Chester Morny. "There, doesn't that prove my point?" he demanded.

"Hit him, Otto," Morny said.

The big man's club-like fist lashed out, the room tilted, there was a numbness in Arthur's jaw, and he sat down against the wall. He struggled slowly but angrily to his feet: it was one thing when the Army doctors hadn't believed Alice Davenport's story of his wild talent; it was another thing altogether when he demonstrated it and was doubted. He rushed at Otto, but the big man fended him off easily with one hand and asked Morny: "You want I should really cool him, boss?"

Morny shook his head. "You outsmarted yourself, Turpin," he said. "You just proved—if there ever was any doubt—that you masterminded the robbery. For who but one of the thieves would have known the contents of the safe? No, Turpin, you can't get away with any cock-and-bull stories about seeing through walls. A hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars was stolen from this safe. *I want that money.*"

"Don't look at me," Arthur said. "Call the cops."

Otto snorted. "Who do ya think the cops is in Paradise B?" he asked. "I'm the cops."

"What he means," Morny

explained, "is that since the townships of Paradise A and B were incorporated for the convenience of the hotels, the hotel private detectives make up the police forces."

"And I'm the house dick here," Otto declaimed. "You want the cops— You got 'em here."

Morny went on: "As you may have noticed when coming into the Golden Heron, there is a stone and barbed wire fence—the barbed wire masked in shrubbery—surrounding the hotel. All exits through this fence are now closed. Somewhere in the hotel or on its grounds are your confederates. I want them and I want the money, but I don't want the publicity of a major robbery. Therefore," finished Morny in a cold, precise voice, "find your confederates, find the money, return it to me, and you're free to go."

"But I want *my* money!" Arthur protested. "I won seven thousand dollars at the poker table. If they're still holding that for me, I'll count it as part of the unpaid bill. That means you still owe me three thousand dollars for delivering a planeload of orchids from Yucatan."

Morny ignored him. "The

girl stays with me," he said. "Security, you might say."

"But she's only a nurse at the—"

"Sure, and you can see through walls and I read tea leaves. Now, will you be good enough to get going, Turpin? Are your confederates guests at the hotel? Are they hiding on the grounds somewhere?"

"I demand that you release Miss Davenport."

"Jack," growled Otto, "you ain't in a position to demand nothing."

"May I tell him something?" Alice asked Morny.

And, when Morny nodded, she went over to Arthur and whispered: "Don't worry about me. If the real crooks are hiding out in the hotel somewhere, you ought to be able to locate them with your X-ray eyes. So locate them and we're free to go. Please, Arthur. Will you try?"

"Please? Don't be silly, I've got to."

In spite of their plight, Alice smiled. "Well, here's your chance to be what the psychologists say is everybody's secret desire: a Peeping Tom to end all Peeping Toms."

"Very funny," Arthur said. But buried somewhere at the back of his mind was a pleas-

ant, almost a tingling, sensation at the thought of seeing the idle rich—most of them from Hollywood's fabulous movie colony on the other side of the high Sierras—at play.

"Chief," the receptionist told Morny suddenly, "I think someone ought to go with him."

"Otto will be watching him at all times, Louise. But if you were going to volunteer, thank you just the same."

"Otto's plenty busy, isn't he? Besides, I don't mean to follow Mr. Turpin. I mean to accompany him, to be with him at all times and make sure he doesn't contact or warn his confederates in any way. I'll be perfectly safe. Turpin wouldn't dream of trying anything with his moll in your custody."

"I'm not his moll!" Alice cried.

Morny nodded slowly. "You have a point, Louise. Yes. Yes, indeed. You may accompany him."

With a cold smile, Louise found Arthur's elbow and tucked her hand under it. "Shall we go?" she said, almost sweetly.

"Unfortunately," Arthur told her, "yes."

They left so swiftly that

Alice did not even have a chance to say good-bye.

Twenty minutes later Louise told Arthur: "That's the swimming pool sundeck ahead there."

Arthur heard the sound of happy voices, laughter, splashing water. "But it's almost midnight," he protested.

"We have midnight swims at the Heron."

They stepped out on the hard surface of the sundeck. Blue spotlights gleamed on the surface of the water. A waiter came by with a tray of cocktails and Louise plucked two martinis off. "Here," she said, giving one to Arthur, "to us."

"What do you mean, to us?"

Louise clinked glasses with him. "It's obvious, isn't it?"

"Not to me, it isn't."

"Then I'll tell you. Mr. Morny assumed you had, as he put it, cased the joint. But if you cased it so thoroughly that you knew the complete contents of the safe, that would mean that you'd already opened the safe. If you already opened it, you wouldn't have needed any confederates to do the actual job for you while you were out front playing poker. Conclusion is," she went on cold-

ly, precisely, "you knew the contents of the safe without opening it. Either I told you, or Otto told you, or Mr. Morny told you himself. But I don't believe that for a minute. Result: that means you actually *can* see through walls and things."

Arthur sighed. "I'm glad somebody believes me. Will you please go back and tell Mr. Morny so Miss Davenport and I can get out of here?"

Louise smiled at him. It was quite a smile. It did things to her cold, aloof face. It made her beautiful. "Not on your life," she said. "That's why I volunteered to go along with you." She drew Arthur off into a stand of yellow oleander bushes masking the sundeck. She came close to him in the darkness.

"Delightful fragrance," she said. "Isn't it?"

"Yes," said Arthur.

"It's my perfume," said Louise.

"Oh," said Arthur.

"Here," said Louise.

Arthur felt his head drawn forward and down. The fragrance of musk and oleander and jasmine came closer, enveloping him. Something soft prodded his face and the

next thing he knew he was being held by warm soft arms and kissed by warm, moving, parting, exciting lips.

"Arthur," Louise murmured. "Arthur, don't you see? With your ability to see through walls and things, there isn't anything we couldn't do. We could clean out every gambling casino in Vegas, and then—"

Arthur took a deep breath. Louise's kissing had stirred him. Her cold, aloof look was only a front: a hot-blooded girl, if a coldly calculating one, hid behind it. He interrupted almost reluctantly: "I already thought of that possibility." He leered, trying a cold front of his own. "I didn't think a partner was necessary. In fact—" as the aura of Louise's fragrance came toward him again— "I think I'd better get out of here right now."

He turned and took three strides across the sundeck and collided with something big and unyielding.

"Where ya think ya going, Jack?" Otto demanded.

Louise came out of the oleanders. "Over to the cottages," she suggested quickly. "We may have a lead."

"Yeah? What kind of lead?"

"I'll tell you when I'm sure myself," Louise said in her frostiest voice. "Meanwhile, if you'll just leave us alone . . ."

"Boss said I ought to keep an eye on you."

"Oh, yes? You're going to ruin everything. Go back and tell the chief I said so."

"Well, I dunno—"

"Come on, Arthur," Louise said, and took his hand, and ran.

Their feet flew on the sun-deck, then along a lamplit path bordered by more oleanders, by hibiscus and fragrant sand verbena, then across an expanse of sand and through a parking lot in which rows of five-thousand-dollar sedans and more expensive sports cars were lined.

"We're not going to the cottages," Louise panted. "We're going to the main building. They'll never think of looking for us there. Besides, that's where my room is."

And, not many moments later, Louise shut the door behind them, crossed the floor to the window wall and drew the draw drapes, then turned on the light. The light, which came from hidden recesses in the wall, was

faintly blue. It was a blue room, with blue amorphous carpet strips on a blue tile base, blue drapes, even blue tinted furniture, reflected in a blue-tinted mirror wall and a blue-tinted mirror covering the ceiling. Only the bed—a large Hollywood bed—was dazzlingly white.

"You like it?" Louise asked. "The bedspread's ermine."

"Ermine," repeated Arthur.

"You don't mind if I change out of my business clothes, do you? Won't be a minute."

"Sure," said Arthur, thinking that as soon as she went into the curtained dressing alcove he would get out, but fast.

"So we won't be disturbed," Louise said, and crossed to the door. It had a keylock inside and out. Louise locked it from the inside and slipped the key where women have been known to slip keys. Then she went into the dressing alcove and the curtain rustled and moved.

"Why don't you make us some drinks?" Louise suggested. "Fixings in the highboy."

Obediently, Arthur went to the highboy, opened it and found a small, well-provi-

sioned bar. As in a dream, he mixed a pitcher of martinis. This, he told himself, couldn't be happening. He was clearly being propositioned. More than propositioned, he was being madly pursued.

For his X-ray eyes, he told himself. But it was nice to think otherwise, as it had been nice to think of cleaning out every big gambling establishment in North America before heading on to greener pastures on the Riviera. . . .

"I told you it wouldn't take a minute," Louise breathed.

The curtains parted. Louise came into the room wearing a pale blue fog. At least in the blue light it looked like a pale blue fog. Actually it was a peignoir as tenuous as Arthur's fading dreams of glory.

He'd been wrong about Louise's figure. Boyish was the wrong word. Louise was coltish, with long firm limbs and the loveliest of shadows and curves under the clinging silk of the peignoir. Arthur's pulses pounded with mounting excitement as she drifted toward him, the silk of the peignoir rustling faintly. Then all at once he re-

membered Alice Davenport's words. She'd said he would not need his X-ray vision in Las Vegas. She'd said it angrily because she thought Las Vegas would turn his head. Well, wasn't she right? Hadn't she come after him, because she felt responsible? Wasn't she Chester Morny's hostage, thanks to him?

"The drinks?" Louise purred.

"Here," Arthur said dismally.

Louise clinked her glass against his glass. They drank. Arthur hadn't eaten since leaving the hospital and the martini raced through his veins to his head. He felt curiously light-headed. It was an interesting, and a most pleasant, sensation. He put his glass down on the highboy. When he lifted it again, it was full. Strange, he thought dreamily. He'd emptied it. He drank. Louise smiled at him. His head whirled and whirled. The blue fog rustled closer. He took three steps backward and sat down on the white ermine bedspread. The blue fog settled alongside him. Louise's face blurred up at him. Louise smiled seductively and said

something. He didn't understand the words, but the words didn't really matter. Louise touched him. Her lips touched his lips, and clung there. They settled back slowly on the white ermine. Blue fog and jasmine and whirling head. . . .

"The gadget," Louise said from a long way off.

"Gadget? What gadget?" Dreamily.

"The gadget you use. Come on, Arthur. Arthur . . ."

"Gadget I use for what?"

"The gadget you use to see through walls and things. Can't I just see it, Arthur darling? Can't I just have one look at it."

"No gadget," Arthur mumbled.

"But Arthur, I already proved to you why I know there has to be a gadget. Arthur? Please, Arthur, just a little peek?"

"No. You don't understand. There isn't a gadget. Just my eyes."

"Just — your — eyes?" Louise's voice sounded distant, distrustful.

"Just my X-ray eyes."

He was staring at white ermine. The blue fog rose, drifted away. The blue fog's voice said, "I don't believe you. There has got to be a gadget. If you think you can

play fast and loose with me, Arthur Turpin, I'll . . ."

"So don't believe me," Arthur said. "Look, am I wearing any gadget over my eyes?"

"No-o."

"And the door's shut?"

"Yes, of course."

"Then if I tell you what's in the hall on the other side of it, will you believe me?"

"Tell me." Doubtfully.

Arthur stared. The door dissolved.

Arthur sat bolt upright.

He stood up on wobbly feet. His head reeled. "Quick!" he said. "Get out of that peignoir. I mean, get into something else. Quick!"

"What's the matter?"

"It's Otto, coming this way."

Seconds later, a big fist pounded on the door.

Louise rushed frantically into the dressing alcove, stripping off the peignoir and revealing the bare, beautiful ivory of her back as she ran. After his first surprise, Arthur went almost casually to the door. What was he worrying about Otto for? There wasn't anything special about Otto, was there? Just a big mass of muscle with the brains of a trained seal. But there was something

special about Arthur Turpin, all right. He'd been feeling his wings, so to speak; he'd been pushed around long enough. It was clearly time to assert himself now . . .

Some of the starch went out of him when he couldn't open the door because Louise still had the key. Out in the hall Otto pounded and made threatening noises. He was pounding with something harder than his fist now. Arthur dissolved the door with his X-ray vision, and blanched. Otto was banging on the wood panel with a blue steel automatic only a little smaller than a sixteen-inch naval gun.

In a surprisingly short time Louise came to the door wearing her man-tailored suit. Arthur held his hand out and she gave him the key without a word. She was very pale.

"Pardon me for saying so," Arthur told her, "but I don't get you. A few minutes ago you were for dividing the financial world up between us. But now, just because Otto comes along—"

"You don't understand. Mr. Morny has a hold on everyone working for him."

"A hold?"

"Call it blackmail if you want. There's a skeleton in

just about every closet, isn't there? Mr. Morny found my skeleton a long time ago. I was crazy to think I could get away with anything."

"Openupinere!" roared the enraged Otto.

Shrugging, Arthur used the key and jerked the door in. An unprepared Otto lurched into the room and sailed across it to the dressing alcove, his hands flailing at air and finally dragging down the heavy drapes. They cloaked him from head to ankles and he staggered about the room trying to claw free of them. The more he tried, the more entangled he became.

"Hurry," Arthur said, pushing Louise ahead of him into the hallway. He followed her, shut the door, locked it, and grinned. "That ought to hold Otto for a while," he said.

"Mr. Morny will be furious. What are you going to do now, Arthur?" Louise was obviously frightened, but there was more respect in her voice for Arthur than there had been previously.

"Why, find the crooks, of course. Come on."

That was easier said than done. With an almost exhausted Louise trailing

along, Arthur spent the remainder of the night and the early morning hours searching the Golden Heron with his X-ray vision. At first he was embarrassed by some of the middle-of-the-night and behind-closed-doors escapades his wild talent revealed to him, but after a while he achieved the necessary detachment to go ahead with his systematic search. At first he described some of the scenes to Louise as delicately as possible, naming the participants if he recognized them from moving pictures or magazine features, but Louise's eyes became so bright with a blend of curiosity and avarice—curiosity because second hand at least she was seeing how celebrities lived behind closed doors, avarice because she told Arthur they could become the most successful extortionists the world had ever seen—that Arthur soon told her nothing.

It was past eight in the morning and the first early risers at the resort were getting up for breakfast when Arthur finished his search, without success. Theoretically, of course, the thieves could have hidden their loot somewhere on the Golden Heron's many landscaped

acres. X-ray vision wouldn't help Arthur find it then, but it seemed more likely that they had kept the money with them so that, if the opportunity presented itself, they could leave the Heron's grounds at a moment's notice.

"Well, that's that," Arthur said.

"You didn't find it?"

"I didn't find it."

"What are you going to do? Mr. Morny will be furious."

"Listen," Arthur said, "he's insured, isn't he?"

"Yes, I suppose so. So what?"

"So why is he so worried about losing the money? All he's got to do is put a claim in, and—"

"The publicity."

"I still don't get it. That kind of publicity never hurt a business like this. It would add glamor."

"Notoriety is the last thing Mr. Morny wants."

"Then there's still something very fishy about it. Wouldn't Morny's insurance company realize he didn't want notoriety? And if they realized it, wouldn't they respect his wishes and his needs?"

"You lost me somewhere in there, Arthur."

"I mean, Mr. Morny is acting mighty darned peculiar for a man who just lost almost two hundred thousand bucks and only has to make a telephone call to his insurance agent to be reimbursed."

"So?"

"So we're going to see Mr. Morny. Come on."

"But—"

"But nothing. I'm beginning to think your Mr. Morny had me all lined up as his fall guy. If I hadn't depended so much on my X-ray vision, I'd have realized it sooner. Are you coming or aren't you?"

"Arthur, you're so different than you were when you first came. You've suddenly changed so!"

Arthur shrugged. He'd never been a milktoast, but he'd never been a Goliath-slaying David, either. He'd been a pretty ordinary guy in an anything but ordinary profession. It wasn't everyone who flew rare flowers and animal specimens up from the jungles of South and Central America for a living. But his profession had dominated, and Arthur Turpin, the individual, had never amounted to much. Now he sensed that the

freak accident, the dose of Q-radiation which had so strangely altered the process of vision in his eyes and his brain, had done something else to him. It had acted, in the course of one night, as a catalyst for his personality.

"Are you coming?" he asked again. Louise was a beautiful girl. He did not love her. Now, Alice Davenport was someone he might in time fall in love with, but that was besides the point. The point was that he, Arthur Turpin, had a perfect right to expect beautiful women—like Louise, like Alice, even like the poker-playing blonde, Miss Cynthia—to be at his beck and call. He was Arthur Turpin, wasn't he?

"Y-yes, Arthur," Louise said dutifully.

With her, and with a purposeful gleam in his eye, Arthur set off down a path bordered by blooming yellow oleander bushes.

They reached the bedroom wing of the main building a few minutes later. The staff of the Golden Heron was busy at a hundred varied jobs getting the resort ready for its new day. Gardeners, plumbers, electricians, stonemasons, painters, polishers

—all worked before the brick facade of the building in the hot, early morning desert sun. Arthur went by with Louise and they didn't even stop their work to look. Arthur glanced at the brick wall of the building, more from habit than from curiosity. The wall dissolved and a woman's bedroom took its place.

It was Miss Cynthia, stretching languidly after a night's sleep, and wearing about what you would expect a pretty girl to be wearing when she stretched languidly after a night's sleep. Work went on all about him; naturally, he was the only one who saw. He was about to turn away with the philosophical observation that if you could see into any bower you wished, and through any garments you wished, after a while the female form became, like any other pleasure abused, an item almost of indifference. This was very unfortunate to Arthur, who was young and sufficiently hot-blooded, and he vowed not to abuse his wild talent in the future.

But he did not turn away or shut off his X-ray vision. For just then Chester Morny entered the room on the other side of the brick wall.

Miss Cynthia quickly cloaked her nakedness with a robe and made an indignant face. Chester Morny smiled and said something. Miss Cynthia smiled too. Chester Morny held up his hand. It was not empty. It most definitely was not empty.

In Mr. Morny's hand was a roll of bills fat enough to choke a brontosaurus.

"He's got it!" Arthur cried indignantly. "He had it all the time!"

"Who?" demanded Louise. "Who has got and has had what?"

But instead of answering, Arthur dragged her toward the building entrance.

Three tough-looking characters reached it at about the same time they did. At first Arthur paid no attention to them, except to note that two of them seemed even bigger and tougher than Otto, and the third a considerably bigger and more confident version of Chester Morny. But then the figures went the same way that Arthur went with Louise. Across the lobby and down the hall and through the arch and down another hall. To a stop before the same door.

"You got your hooks into Morny too, buddy?" the more capable looking version of

Chester Morny asked Arthur.

"Why, no. I—"

"See if he's clean, Horse," the man said.

One of the thugs ran a pair of hands almost the size of awol bags over Arthur's wrinkled suit. "He's clean, boss," the man called Horse said.

Boss nodded, and knocked on the door. But how, Arthur wondered, does he know Morny's in Miss Cynthia's room?

In a moment Miss Cynthia opened the door. When she saw who it was she smiled the incredible canine smile and said, "Marty, I thought you'd never get here."

"Who is it, Cynthia?" Chester Morny called from inside the room.

"Telegram, Chet," Miss Cynthia said in an innocent voice. "They want you to sign personally."

The man named Marty said: "When he comes to the door, Horse, clobber him."

"Right, boss," the Horse said.

Chester Morny appeared at the door, blinking. The Horse swung his right fist up, then down. It was the biggest fist Arthur had ever seen. It struck Chester

Morny's head. It made a dull sound against the crown of his head and he seemed to sink half a foot into the floor. Without a sound he began to fall forward. The Horse caught him on the way down.

Arthur took Louise's elbow and turned around. "We were just going," he said.

"Hold it," Marty snapped. Arthur and Louise held it.

"Tick Tock," Marty addressed the second thug, "you take Mr. Morny out to the car. Horse, you and I will escort these two."

Tick Tock carried Chester Morny. The Horse produced a gun which looked like a miniature in his huge fist but actually was a .45 automatic. Arthur and Louise preceded him out the door at the end of the hall. Marty and Miss Cynthia followed them.

"You got the money, baby?" Marty asked the poker girl.

"You bet, honey," Miss Cynthia said. It surprised Arthur. It was the first time Miss Cynthia called someone anything but Daddy.

"Him and his crazy ideas," Marty said.

"You mean Chet, honey?"

"Sure. We've got the girl. Keep the girl, he said, and we'd get the money. I went

along at first, Cynthia. Then I got to thinking. If we were caught at it, the charge would be kidnaping. Why should we take the chance? I asked myself. We didn't owe Morny a cent. He owed us a hundred seventy-five grand. He—"

"Would the girl be Alice Davenport?" Arthur asked.

"Shut yer trap," The Horse said.

Just then Otto came running ponderously toward them, mayhem in his small, beady eyes.

"Take him, Horse," Marty said unconcernedly.

The Horse and Otto met head-on. Arthur thought of the irresistible force and the immovable object, but was wrong. Perhaps The Horse was the nearest human equivalent of the irresistible force, but Otto was far from the immovable object. They struck in a wild flurry of enormous arms. It lasted all of five seconds. At the end of that time, Otto was horizontal. The Horse hadn't even worked up a sweat.

"As I was saying," Marty told Miss Cynthia calmly, "it was Morny who owed me the dough, not the other way around. I didn't want to take any chances. Why should I? I must have been crazy yes-

terday. What was his idea, anyway?"

Miss Cynthia showed her canines as they approached a long, black, seven-passenger car. "He stole his own money. A hundred and seventy-five grand, exactly what he owed you."

"He's got a nerve. He runs a gambling joint himself. Not as big as mine, sure, but he ought to know that a loser never welches."

"He was going to pay you. He was going to collect the insurance on the money he stole himself. Then he thought the insurance company might get suspicious, and he looked around for a fall guy. He found this one." Miss Cynthia indicated Arthur.

"You mean he was going to frame him?"

"Not so the law could make it stick. Just enough so the insurance company wouldn't be suspicious."

"You've got the money?"

Miss Cynthia patted her false front as they got into the car. Tick Tock was behind the wheel. Chester Morny was just coming to in one of the jump seats. Marty went in front with Tick Tock, The Horse and his gun got in back with Morny, Louise,

Miss Cynthia and Arthur, and the car rolled away.

"Horse," said Marty after a few moments. "Blindfold them."

The Horse did so. The blindfold was drawn tight across Arthur's eyes. Naturally he would be able to see through it, but he didn't broadcast this information. He squinted, and frowned. He could see through it, all right—but only faintly. Everything was blurry.

"Why the blindfolds?" Chester Morny asked sullenly.

Marty seemed quite chipper. "Because I may let you go after we get where we're going. If I do, I don't want you knowing how you've come or where you've been."

"May let us go?" Arthur asked.

"I wouldn't want any trouble with the law," Marty said. "What I did last night in a weak moment was kidnapping. I may have to . . . well, The Horse may have to do a job on you."

"My pleasure, boss," The Horse said with devotion to duty.

"You — mean —" moaned Louise "— kill — us?"

Marty grunted. Through his blindfold Arthur saw the shadowy, blurry face of The

Horse. His X-ray vision was fading more every moment. Apparently it wasn't going to be permanent, and Arthur was almost glad. It had brought him nothing but trouble. But, he decided with a sigh, its permanence might be hardly more than a rhetorical consideration. For The Horse was smiling. If The Horse got his orders, he wouldn't mind killing them. All of them.

The car drove swiftly out into the desert.

"Everybody out," Marty said two hours later after they rolled to a stop.

Awkwardly, the blindfolded prisoners piled out, The Horse following them with his .45 automatic. Miss Cynthia and Marty, arm in arm and smiling, brought up the rear. A door opened, squeaking on rusted hinges. A voice said, "You got a regular delegation, boss."

"The girl all right?" Marty asked.

"Sure, boss. Only what are we going—?"

At that moment more footsteps came running and a girl's voice cried, "Arthur! It's you, Arthur. I was so frightened, I . . . oh, Arthur . . . Arthur, you're a prisoner too." It was Alice Daven-

port, first wildly happy, then suddenly, bleakly, bitterly crestfallen.

"Well, boss?" The Horse asked. His attitude reminded Arthur of Otto, but compared with The Horse, Otto was strictly an amateur.

"Please," Morny begged suddenly, "you've got to give me a break. I would have paid you, I was going to pay you, I never intended to welch. But I—I have other debts. I—"

"A big-shot gambler like you?" Marty said sardonically. "In debt? That wouldn't be gambling debts, would it?"

"I—I don't know what made me do it. Yours and the other big gambling joints on the Strip, Marty. I owe a fortune. I can't pay you now. Give me time. Let me collect from the insurance . . ."

"But you're forgetting something, Morny. We already have your money. Cynthia, give it to me."

Arthur heard a rustling sound, then a bleat of despair from Morny. "I'm ruined," he cried. "Ruined."

"Look out, Miss Cynthia!" the man named Tick Tock called.

Arthur heard a scream, a quick scurrying movement

of feet on sand. "Stop him!" Marty shouted. "He's taken the money from Miss Cynthia. He's—"

There was more shouting. Arthur felt something heavy collide with him. He was pushed, lost his balance, stumbled. He clawed out and came into contact with an arm almost as big around as his own waist, and hard as granite. It was The Horse.

"Kill him!" Marty cried. "Kill Morny, he's trying to get away. He'll report us for kidnaping and we'll never be able to prove he's responsible."

"The little guy—" The Horse protested. Arthur was clinging to his gun arm.

Marty's words sounded like a pronouncement of doom. "*Then kill him too.*"

The enormous arm shook. Arthur, clinging grimly, was almost flung aside. He crouched abruptly, scooped up a handful of sand, flung it. The Horse howled. Arthur grabbed blindly at his gun-hand while The Horse went on howling and pawing at his blinded eyes. Arthur grabbed the gun away and stumbled back three steps and fell down in the sand, holding onto the .45 grimly.

"Rush him, for crying out loud!" Marty cried. "He's

blindfolded, he can't see a thing."

"Wait!" Arthur commanded in a voice which held an authority he did not feel. "I can see you. I can see you all. The blindfold doesn't matter. I'll shoot the first man who comes near me. I'll shoot to kill."

"That's right," Louise said hurriedly. "He can see through things. I don't know how he does it, but he can."

"He's got X-ray vision," Alice said solemnly.

"They're bluffing," Marty said. "They're crazy."

"Yes?" Arthur shouted. "Miss Cynthia, turn around. Face me. That's right. Stand there. Marty," he went on relentlessly, "look at her. What would you say her bust measures, thirty-seven?"

Miss Cynthia cried out indignantly, but Marty said, "You heard him."

"Thank you," said Arthur. "Now then, Miss Cynthia, have I ever seen you—ah, in *deshabille*?"

"No," Miss Cynthia said, still indignant.

"Miss Cynthia," said Arthur in a cool, detached voice, "wears a very ingenious false front. She is flat-chested." Miss Cynthia cried out in rage. "Well,

Marty, isn't she?" Arthur demanded triumphantly.

There was a silence. Miss Cynthia was sobbing. Finally Marty said: "He can do it. He can actually see through things. Clothes, his blindfold, everything."

"You, Horse," Arthur commanded. "Come here. Slowly, one step at a time. That's right. This blindfold is hurting my eyes. Remove it."

Of course, Arthur could have done it himself, but he knew that if he could cow the most powerful of the thugs, the rest would be easy. He heard The Horse advancing slowly across the sand, one heavy step at a time. The world seemed to stand still. He could imagine The Horse's huge arms swinging at his sides—arms that could crush the life out of Arthur in a moment. He could imagine The Horse's face, confused, uncertain, but brutal. "Slowly," he said. "Slowly. I'm watching you."

Another pause. A very long pause. The still, hot air, the angry sun, the desert sands—all seemed to wait. There was no sound from The Horse now, but he was close. Very close.

Then the blindfold was jerked from Arthur's face.

He stepped back quickly, brandishing the .45 in the bright sunlight. "Remove your own blindfold," he told Louise. He saw a solid-looking ranch-house, a stand of cactus. "Go inside," he told Alice. "Find some rope or some drapery or something to tie these people with." Alice nodded, and disappeared inside. Arthur had never felt so masterful in his life. He could cope with any situation now, he told himself. Any situation at all.

"You, Tick Tock," he said. "Go and find Mr. Morny. Bring him back, but don't hurt him. Miss Cynthia, put the money down." Miss Cynthia did so. "Louise, you find a telephone and call the police." Louise obediently went into the house.

Fifteen minutes later, Tick Tock returned with Morny. "You can have your money," Arthur told Marty, "after I take the ten thousand that's coming to me, and provided the police let you keep it." He took the ten thousand. He felt like a giant. He had never felt so wonderful in his life. He tossed the remainder of the thick role indifferently at Marty.

When the police came, Arthur explained the situation and said he would be glad to

drop into town to make a legal deposition. With Alice he was driven back to Las Vegas by the chief of the Las Vegas police.

Alice said: "You were wonderful out there."

Arthur said: "I want to get to know you better, much better. All right?"

"Then Louise—?"

"Meant nothing to me."

"Boy, thank the lucky stars for your X-ray vision. It really got us out of a jam."

"Did it?"

"Why, of course. If you hadn't been able to see through that blindfold, the gun wouldn't have done you much good."

"I'd seen Miss Cynthia

with my X-ray vision before," he said. "And you'd better tell me about that lovely little mole. I'm beginning to forget what it looks like."

Alice blushed. "But you—"

Arthur shook his head. "Apparently the radiation which gave me X-ray vision was only temporary. It wore off on the drive out into the desert. By the time we arrived, I couldn't see a thing."

"Then you—"

"Yes," said Arthur. "I bluffed them."

Alice nuzzled against him. "You were wonderful out there. You'll get to know me better, all right. I'll see to it."

And, Arthur knew, she would.

THE END



"Ullg feels that a thing worth doing is worth doing well!"

A BUCKETFUL OF DIAMONDS

By HARLAN ELLISON

Davey had spent his life looking for the easy grift—the big take. That was why he happened to be in jail. Then this Estrion joe offered him the key to the bank—for a price. This last didn't worry Davey because o guy who could crack the vault could certainly pay off. Or so it seemed.

DAVEY BAER was warming a pad in the city jail when the monster came.

It slithered through the wall and hung ten inches off the floor, its gigantic bald head, brushing through the ceiling of the cell, partially cut off from Davey's sight.

"Hmm," it grumbled in a voice that sounded only in Davey's head, "wish I could position properly." It disappeared for a second, then flickered back and was resting on the floor, its head now completely in view. The cell was ten feet high and the being just barely made it.

It looked very much like the medieval impression of a *jinn*. A high forehead that ended in an almost bald pate. A pigtail that rose straight up from the top of its skull

and held at the base by a silver circlet, fell in thick, black waves down its back.

It stared down at Davey unblinkingly. "Fine second-story man *you* are!" it chided him, monstrous taloned hands on its full hips.

Words clogged back in Davey's throat. He'd been a crook for almost eighteen years, and he'd never feared man or beast. But this didn't seem to be either.

"I'm a pretty *good* second-story man!"

The thing sank down on its haunches, its leather half-jacket and leather breeches wrinkling at the action. "How many arrests does this one make?"

"Major ones? Or little ones?"

"Don't count the little ones."

"This is the fourth." Davey stared brazenly at the thing for a second, then his glance fell away.

"They're going to put you in for keeps this time," the thing assured him.

Davey suddenly caught himself. Here he was, talking calmly about his record, the state of his future with this—this—"Who are you, *what* are you? How'd you get in here?"

The thing smiled. Its smile made Davey's blood freeze. The twin rows of razor-sharp teeth were ivory-white and formidable.

"I'm an Estrian. From another time-line. Don't try to figure it out. The thing that counts is that I can be of service to you."

Davey drew a deep gulp. "Service?" He looked up at the Estrian doubtfully. "How can you be of service?"

"How would you like to be able to walk walls, to walk up any building in the city and rob anyone you wished? How would you like to do it, knowing that everyone was looking the other way?" The thing bounced slightly, still crouching on its haunches. Its monstrous face came closer to

Davey's, and the second-story man tried to move back further, but his back was already against the wall.

"But that's impossible!" Davey protested. There was no point in continuing to disbelieve the reality of this creature. He was obviously here—and even though he was terrifying, still he *was* making pleasant noises.

"Not impossible," the being corrected. "I can easily give you the power to walk up any wall. Not only that—I can assure you that anyone who might see you, while you, ah—work—will turn his head!"

Davey felt a warm glow spread down through his body. What a marvelous idea! What a terrific thing that would be! Visions of scampering up the walls of apartment buildings, climbing in the windows of the city's wealthiest citizens, rifling their safes and jewel boxes undisturbed!

It was staggering. And with people turning their backs—it was foolproof. He could pick their pockets without their even knowing it. He didn't doubt, now, that the Estrian could do it. Any being that could walk through a prison wall shouldn't find it taxing to do just as it said.

"No one will see you. They



Both men carefully counted the money.

will just automatically turn around and look away. Everything you've always wanted, Davey Baer. What do you say? Would you like the power?"

Davey cocked an eyebrow at the Estrian. "Why should you be so anxious to do this for me? Why hand out something as hot as this?"

The Estrian made a gesture. "I want you to rob someone for me."

"Uh-uh," Davey objected, shaking his head. "I'm a loner. I work for myself. No partners."

"No, no, nothing like that." "I just want you to rob *one* person. Just one job, and steal just one item; a little block of metal in a man's apartment."

Davey's eyebrows arched. "Why should *I* do it? What's the matter with you? If you can go through walls and give people the power to climb like a human fly, then why don't *you* steal it?"

The Estrian shook its head sadly. "I wish I could. I really wish I could. But I can't."

"Why not?"

"Watch," the Estrian said. He took a short step, and was almost on top of Davey. The second story man cringed back. The Estrian lifted a huge, taloned hand. "Watch

what happens when I hit you."

"No! No... don't! You will kill me!" But the huge hand swooped down and slashed at his face, the razor-nailed fingers coming directly at his eyes. They passed harmlessly through.

The being shrugged. "See?"

Davey mumbled, confused, "—but you—you *hit* me! You should have killed me with a slam like that!"

"I'm just not in your timeline," the Estrian explained. "I can be seen, and I can control minds to a certain extent—" the mental voice lowered to a confiding whisper, "—that's how I can make people turn their heads when you're climbing or working. But I can't touch anything. And nothing can touch me. I'm immaterial."

Davey edged from his corner for the first time since the Estrian had appeared. He made a tentative stab with his thumb at the huge being. The thumb passed through flesh and bone without any resistance whatsoever. "It's true!" he said, marvelling.

"That's right. That's why I want you to steal this one little thing for me—and you can have the powers all the rest of your life. How about it?"

"When would you want me to pull this job?"

"Oh, not for a few months yet. I've—uh—I've got to wait a bit till he isn't suspicious." He looked down at Davey with appeal in his hellish eyes.

Davey considered. It *seemed* foolproof. The Estrian couldn't double-cross him, nor could he harm him—he wasn't real, actually. And though the powers seemed amazing, there could be little doubt that what the being said was true. It was a real set-up.

"You're on!" Davey said, and reached out to shake the Estrian's hand. "Oh, sorry."

The Estrian blushed slightly. "That's all right. We'll get along famously together—even though you'll only see me once more."

"Why?"

"What's the point? You've got the power already. You'll see me only when I want you to do that job for me."

"I've already *got* the power?"

The Estrian nodded. "Try it." And the Estrian vanished.

The power! Now he had the ability to walk walls. To touch any treasure no matter how far out of reach it might seem. The second-story business was going to get a new

dimension. He grinned as he thought of how many people considered their homes safe if their doors were locked. Most of those same people left their windows open—if they were high off the ground. They would be easy marks for Davey Baer, human fly.

I'll have to try this thing. He walked toward the wall, and stopped. He didn't *feel* any different.

Except in the ears. He felt light, almost airy, as though a breeze were playing around inside his head and he concluded that somehow the Estrian had tampered with the balance of the semi-circular canals in his inner ear, thus altering his balance sense.

Was this true? Or had the whole thing been a product of too much jail?

There was only one way to find out for certain. He approached the wall and raised his left leg. He set his foot full against the wall, and leaned his weight backward.

His body hung parallel to the floor. He placed his right foot on the wall, ahead of the left. Up, step by step, up. He walked the wall. At the juncture of ceiling and wall he laughed like a maniac. This was wonderful! His fortune was made! There wasn't a building or bank or apart-

ment in the world that could keep him out now! He walked down the other wall.

Now all he had to do was get out of jail.

But the trial was two days away, and even then, they'd probably convict him. He'd go in for keeps this time.

There had to be a way out! There had to be!

A gleam came into Davey Baer's sharp blue eyes. A thin smile traced across his sharp features. There *was* a way. Yes, indeed there was. He smiled again.

That night, after lights-out, he spent the darkness hours figuring out his plan, perfecting it; figuring a way out of jail as he paced the ceiling.

When they came, two days later, to take him to the court house, they didn't think they'd need handcuffs between the jail steps and the waiting car. Davey was a short, meek-seeming sort. They were wrong, of course.

Davey said, "Excuse me a moment," turned toward the wall, and a few moments later—before their bulging eyes—had walked three flights up, run across the face of the jail, and was gone around the corner of the building.

By the time they had gotten around the building themselves, Davey had crossed to the building next door and was well on his way.

They never saw him again. Just as the Estrian said.

After the thirteenth robbery when he had scaled to the penthouse of the Chandler Building and broken into the safe of the Beekman Jewelry Company, they started talking about a "human fly." No one ever saw him, though his raids were sometimes executed in broad daylight, in crowds of hundreds.

He walked into the third-floor bedroom of one of the city's most prominent socialites, and removed the diamond tiara from her head, the ruby-and-sapphire necklace from her throat. He scaled the inside of a theatre and robbed the wealthy drama-lovers sitting in the boxes. He intercepted a payroll messenger walking along a catwalk of a construction job five hundred feet in the air, and relieved him of his satchel containing almost ten thousand dollars.

He penetrated a bank, executing a magnificent daylight robbery, by walking up the wall and down behind the tellers' cages; helping himself

at random. No one stopped him.

They could not trace him. No fingerprints, no natural or repetitious *modus operandi*, and strangest of all—no footprints! Nothing at all to give even a vague clue to who the mysterious new one-man crime wave was. He raided sealed buildings; he raided unapproachable strongholds none had been able to penetrate before.

Then, slowly, the fever of lofty robberies slowed down.

Only once every month or two did a similar robbery occur. The police were puzzled, but in his newly-acquired home, high in the wealthy hills beyond the city, Davey enjoyed himself fully. Now that he had a nice pile he was going to take it easier . . .

"This one would be just right," he commented, one evening, taking in the social page of the newspaper. The article read:

SCREEN STAR GLORIA EMERSON TO DISPLAY NEW DIAMONDS

Gloria Emerson, well-known "atomic bombshell" of "Wildfire" and "Deadly Nightshade" fame, will hold a dinner party this Wednesday for a group of select

friends and associates. Miss Emerson will wear, for the first time, the "Diamond Cumberbund" created for her by Arpelly & Gorbach, Jewelers.

The cumberbund, valued at close to a half million dollars, will be carried to and from the party by armored car. The style of the . . .

Davey's face glowed with the familiar light. This was another beautiful set-up. A dinner party on the roof garden of Gloria Emerson's apartment building. Thirty-eight stories in the sky. And half a million in diamonds . . .

He smiled the slow smile, and walked up the wall for laughs.

As the Estrian had promised, everyone on the street—doorman, street cleaners, three urchins playing handball, and a strolling young couple included—automatically turned their heads and stared in other directions as Davey, hands in pockets, hat tilted back on his head, whistling *Claire de Lune*, began his upward stroll.

He walked with a jaunty step, occasionally skipping over a window. The first twenty floors were easiest. It was very much like walking

any city block—with the city tilted at right angles. But it got rather windy and chilly from the twentieth on up.

"Brrr," Davey blew his lips, pulling up his coat collar.

He walked up over the building, and stepped quickly over the railing at the top of the penthouse. The night sky watched with star-freckled blankness as he dropped onto the patio, and looked in through the French doors at the party.

Everyone who was anyone was there. Davey saw several of the more famous movie stars; a television comedian, gross and lecherous-looking, whose work he despised; a female authority on sex life in the Pago-Pago island group; an authoress of sex novels set in the same area.

"Rich company," he commented, opening the doors and stepping into the party noise of Gloria Emerson's *soirée*. There was no sense hurrying, so he strolled about, plucking a martini from a servant's silver tray, grabbing several *hors d'oeuvres* from a platter as it was whisked by.

No one noticed him. All heads turned as though on swivel-sticks. He pinched the rear of a tightly-fitted starlet's evening gown, but it

only brought a repressed giggle and a wiggle.

He turned, and bringing back his foot, delivered a resounding whomp to the seat of a full-blown matron's dress. She winced, yelped, and tried to turn her head. Failing this, she did the next best thing, and accused the distinguished-looking man next to her. He wore a red satin band diagonally across his shirt, under his dress suit. Obviously a foreign delegate of some sort.

"What sort of nonsense was *that*?" she demanded.

The man, a British-colonel type, complete to flowing white moustache, turned a baffled stare at her. "I beg your pardon, Madame?"

"Beg my pardon, *nothing*!" she squawked, and dumped her martini in his white hair. The martini soaked in instantly. The high, formidable pompadour of white hair wetted down completely, sagged, and straggled into the blustering face. He gasped a bubbling, "By Jove! I say!"

As Davey moved on, they were going at it hot and heavy with martinis, chopped liver sandwiches and cottage cheese. It had the makings of a full-fledged brawl.

Davey spotted Gloria

Emerson. "So *that's* the 'Atomic Bombshell'!" His whistle was low, long, and overly appreciative.

Gloria Emerson was a natural dyed platinum blonde with all the equipment it took to make a deluxe woman. Her body was full, high-breasted and extravagant in all the right places.

Davey approached her. She watched him coming and started to turn her head. "Oh, no you don't," he said, and kissed her full on the mouth. He felt heat rising in him as Gloria Emerson struck out blindly and slapped a tall, bronzed young man to her right. She delivered a mighty hard blow.

The bronzed Galahad stammered and fumbled for rhyme and reason and took a second clip on the chin.

But by that time Davey was bored with the proceedings. "To work," he philosophized, carefully undoing the glittering diamond cummerbund from about Miss Emerson's slim waist.

The clinging evening ensemble Miss Emerson wore was buttonless, a wraparound sheath affair, held together by the cummerbund.

Her undies were a light pastel pink, and the publicity about the "Atomic Bomb-

shell" never wearing a bra was true.

As Davey boosted himself over the parapet, he tossed a kiss to the screaming, disrobed, bedroom-bound Miss Emerson.

"See ya in the movies, honey!"

Then he was gone.

Finally, after Davey had been forced to open ten bank accounts, throughout the county, all under fake names, the Estrian came to him as he was sunning himself on the patio of his new home. The Estrian materialized up through the concrete of the swimming pool, rose out of the water at the deep end, passed through the diving board, and towered above Davey. He was now over thirty feet high, and twice as unnerving as before.

Davey started violently, dropping his cigarette. "Yowch!" he yelled, beating at the smoldering butt. "Must you do that?"

The Estrian shrugged. It resembled a mountain heaving. "At least this isn't as confining as our last meeting." He stretched his massive arms above his head and stepped out of the pool. "I want that job done for me now."

"Why now?"

"The man I want you to rob is now off-guard."

"Well . . ." Davey drew a deep breath.

The Estrian pointed a branch-sized finger down into Davey's face. "The job as we agreed, or the powers will be lost to you the instant you refuse."

The wealthy second-story man leaped off the reclining chair quickly. His face broke into a comradely smile. "Refuse? Refuse? Who said anything about refusing? Didn't we make a bargain, Estrian, old buddy? *Sure* I'll do it for you! Just clue me in on the details."

The Estrian's features settled into a peaceful placidity, as though a crisis had been reached and surmounted. "The man I want you to rob lives on the twelfth floor at 1779 Brookside Avenue. He has the whole floor. I want you to go directly into his bedroom. That's the window facing on Brookside Avenue itself—and get me just one thing."

Memory stirred in Davey. "A block of metal?"

"That's right."

"On the wall you will see a small shelf. On that shelf is a plain block of metal. Get it and I'll meet you some-

where along the way. Just that. Nothing else."

"Okay."

"And be very careful. This must be successful, but it won't be unless you are cautious. He is a watchful man!"

Davey's brow furrowed. "Sounds oddball to me."

The Estrian's face clouded with anger for the first time. "Miserable human! Do as I say! No questions, no slip-ups! If you fail, the powers will leave you immediately!"

Davey shrugged. "It's your show. Glad to do it for you." He felt a sneeze coming on.

"That all?" he asked the Estrian.

"That's all," the Estrian said. Davey sneezed. A dimming voice said, "Gesundheit!" and when he opened his eyes, the being was gone once more. It was just as unbelievable as before.

Climbing the building was easy. A mere twelve flights, while the cop passing by underneath, turned his face to the gutter. The window was open, and Davey slipped over the sill noiselessly.

A man was asleep in the bed.

He spotted the shelf, saw the plain, dull-grey block of metal. It was the size of a cigarette pack, but squattier.

He grasped it, removed it from the shelf.

The block began to glitter. Brighter, and brighter, casting an eerie blood-red glow across the walls.

The man sat up in bed, his deep, black eyes brightly alert. He opened his mouth to say something. He didn't get it out. *But he did not turn his head—he was staring directly at Davey.*

Then the man changed.

His body melted. It ran and shivered out of shape, like a puddle of mercury sliding downhill. His eyes ran into his cheeks, and his arms slithered free of the pajama tops. The body slid over the edge of the bed, in a flowing stream. It settled into a pool of shapeless mercury-like, shimmering nothing — and then reformed.

. . . and then resolved.

Into an Estrian.

But not an intangible Estrian. Davey knew it was real — was on this time-line, as the first Estrian would have put it—could touch things. The being started across the room, its passage smashing a lamp to the floor.

This Estrian made the other one seem like a tame pussycat. The flames of the pit danced in those black eyes. He advanced on Davey. Davey

dropped the box. It stopped glowing.

"Wh-who-who are you?" The words bubbled out of Davey's mouth.

The huge, saber-toothed mouth gaped open, and the being's voice roared into Davey's mind. "I'm his Warden. So you're the new flunkie he suckered into trying to steal the key to his cell!" The being broke into laughter that shook the fiber of Davey's mind. What did the Estrian mean?

He had to stall him, had to convince him he was only a miserable second-story man, that he hadn't known what he was doing, that he was sorry and would go away and never come back again. *What do I care if I lose the power? I have more money now than I can ever use.*

Davey babbled, "I don't understand; you—you've got to explain! Please! Please, wait a minute, don't hurt me! Tell me!"

The being stopped its relentless advance. "You're even punier and more cowardly than the others he's contacted."

Davey looked up into the fearsome face. "Please tell me—"

The Estrian sneered. "This

time-line—your Earth a part of it—is a prison. A cell for criminals. We render them intangible on this time-line, that's part of their punishment. The only escape route is that block. It undoes their intangibility, allows them access to the time-lines. You aren't the first he's maneuvered into trying to get the block for him. He's been at it for three thousand years. But you'll find the same end as all the others. We can't have our criminals running about."

The Estrian Warden moved forward again.

Davey sank back against the wall, his hands over his

face. The being reached for him. He felt the horrible touch of those gigantic fingers closing about his neck.

"No! No! You can't, I didn't know! It was only a gift—the powers he gave me! I didn't know! Just a gift!"

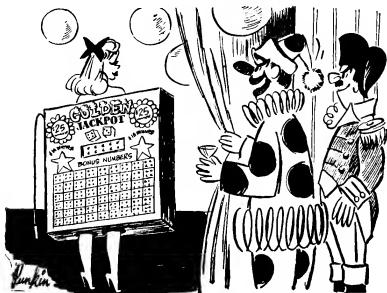
He was screaming, the words more difficult.

"Just—a—gift—"

The Estrian's huge features—its mouthful of knife-edged teeth descending swiftly—broke into a smile. "Then don't look a gift horse in the mouth."

But he wasn't as cruel as he appeared to be. Davey died quickly.

THE END



"Doris couldn't have worn a more appropriate costume!"

Oswald's Willing Women

By BILL MAJESKI

No woman ever looked twice at Oswald—except the one he married. Then he bought the ring with the whistle in it and girls started responding all over town. Overnight he learned what girls are made of and he liked what he learned. But how could an ordinary whistle possess such magic? When Oswald discovered the secret he really began learning about women!

IT WAS a very average ring, inexpensively gold-plated and decorated with a thin metal cap along the top. When Oswald blew on it the top would spin rapidly, displaying a lissome harem girl gyrating happily. She would dance slowly or quickly, depending on how hard he blew.

Accompanying her contortions was an eerie whistle. Oswald had seen dancing girls before, not many of course since his wife was Lambie Fridd, but never had he heard a whistle quite like this—weird, penetrating. The whistle alone was worth the

30 cents he paid the street hawker.

Oswald's first try at the whistle caused instant reaction. Miss Olivia Holcomb, the elevator starter whose face hadn't been violated by a smile for thirty years, actually appeared friendly.

Upstairs in his office, Oswald looked down at the ring and blew softly into it. At that moment his secretary, a Miss Janice Cradle, came in. Janice was a good-natured girl, hitting 30, with a shape like the figure 8.

A graduate of Alice Pearson's Business School, she could take shorthand at 100-

words-per-minute with her legs crossed carelessly. She was given to heady perfumes and bright red knitted dresses. She drank rye and ginger ale at Christmas parties and kissed her superiors under the mistletoe in a manner which fully conveyed a fierce devotion to her job. Otherwise, she treated her employers, including Oswald, with the right amount of casual concern, disdain and indifference. She often stood too close to young male callers and performed an overture to a Haitian love ritual when she sharpened a handful of pencils each morning.

The effect of the whistle on Miss Cradle was immediate. Her face was a beam of promise as she walked over to Oswald's desk.

"Miss Cradle," said Oswald, "forget those letters we were to do today and cancel my appointments. I'm leaving at noon today."

"You're leaving early, Mr. Fridd?" she asked unbelievably. "I hope nothing is seriously wrong." She said it as if she were asking him to help her remove an intimate garment.

"No," he answered, "nothing's wrong." He was going to tell her that his head was

spinning from the efforts of blowing into the ring, but she wouldn't have understood, he decided. He gave the ring a blast. Miss Cradle walked behind the desk. She took his head in her hands and pressed it close to her.

"Miss Cradle, does this have anything to do with office work?" He held his breath as she massaged his gray-speckled hair.

"No, but you look as if you need someone to look after you. And right this moment, too," she replied with a spirited laugh.

"All I need is to be left alone," said Oswald, freeing his head with a mighty effort.

Miss Cradle straightened up. "Well," she said as she walked in her own interesting manner to the door, "if there's anything you need just let me know." She smiled as she closed the door.

Oswald slumped back into his chair. He looked at the mysterious ring whose whistle had such a warming effect on Miss Cradle. He put it to his lips, but then thought better of it as the door wasn't locked and Miss Cradle might prove stronger than he. Besides, Lambie's friends were visiting them tonight and he couldn't afford to take any



Oswald was learning more about women in sixty seconds than most men discover in sixty years.

chances. You can never tell how long a daytime dalliance might last. At 12 noon after making some desultory passes at papers on his desk, he heard Miss Cradle snap shut her pocketbook and click down the hallway. When he heard her footsteps march into an elevator, he grabbed his hat and went out, his ring fitted snugly on his finger. . . .

The bus was filled with shoppers and factory workers from the electric light fixture plant who worked on the 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. shift. But the driver stopped to make room for Oswald and two women, putting him at least six above the safety load of 46 passengers.

"Move to the rear of the bus," shouted the driver mechanically, three inches from Oswald's ear. It was no place to be when your head felt like this and Oswald decided to buck the mass of flesh and move toward the rear of the bus as he had been so kindly advised. Directly in front of him were two women of cliff-like solidity. They worked as assemblers in the plant and were now engaged in a back-to-back, heart-and-soul discussion of the perverse nature of their immediate su-

pervisor, someone named Charley.

Oswald wasn't interested in supervisors named Charley and had no inclination to stay jammed against the women to eavesdrop. He begged a polite pardon, but the women didn't hear. His second plea for permission to pass also went unanswered. He might go around them, or under them, or even over them if he could engage the help of the sweating, jacketed fellow next to him. But that gentleman seemed to be interested in Charley the supervisor. Or maybe it was Charley himself. Best thing to do was slide between the two women. He raised his ring and blew the whistle to stop their talking. The women turned instantly and Oswald slipped quickly between them.

He seemed to be making progress along the women's respective anatomies when the bus gave a sudden, unfortunate lurch. Oswald found himself thrown into an uncompromising position with at least one of the women. It could have been three or four judging from the number of arms and legs in evidence. Oswald somehow was tangled in the woman's coat, and she in his. The oth-

er woman was trying to disengage all moving parts when she fell full force into the fray, and he was meshed in a wild free-for-all.

"Take your leg from around me," she whispered to Oswald. She obviously thought no one would see them and that if she talked softly the knot of three human figures might go unnoticed, but already the trio was the center of attraction for the riders.

"That's not my leg, it's my arm," said Oswald in a steady tone, considering the circumstances. Under him somehow, he felt another head of the same general topographical outline as the one to which he was speaking.

"Well, it feels like your leg," hissed the Whisperer.

"They must be real close friends," said an elderly woman, seated across the aisle.

"I never saw this man before in my life," said the Whisperer in the good, substantial tone of an Offended American Woman.

"Well then how do you know what his leg feels like?" the elderly woman wanted to know.

"Well it's either his leg or a python," said the woman,

who now had given up whispering.

"Pythons don't get on these buses," called the driver without turning around, "company rules. We don't allow no pythons on these buses. If I seen a python on this bus I'd throw him out the door." Then he turned back to take a quick peek and resumed his driving, giving full attention to the road, content in the knowledge that he had protected the company's name against any implication that it was catering to the snake trade.

"Did he say there was a python on this bus?" asked a balding gentleman near Oswald and the two struggling women, one of whom still could not be identified.

"He said there were no pythons on this bus. The company doesn't allow it," someone explained.

"I've been riding with this company for twenty-six years and I've never seen any pythons," he said, obviously misunderstanding.

"Python or not, this fellow must be some sort of a snake to do what he's doing right on this bus," said a gray-haired woman.

"Madam, I'm not doing anything," said Oswald.

"Do you always ride home

from work like that?" she wanted to know. "I've got a good notion to take your picture and send it into *Life*."

"No pictures, please," said the woman draped across the bent figure of Oswald. "I just got out of work. My hair's a mess." Then she discovered her companion was missing. "Ethel. Ethel. Where are you, Ethel?"

"Yes, for God's sake, Ethel, where are you?" screamed Oswald. "Answer your friend."

"Down here behind this fellow's tweed coat," came a muffled voice. Oswald felt a tug at his tweed coat. "I can't move. I thought the bus hit something. Are you all right, Leona?"

"Yes," called Leona, "I'm all right, can you hear me?"

"Yes, I can hear you."

"Good. Don't get excited. You just stay there until we get help. You'll be all right."

Meanwhile, the bus continued jouncing along, causing the three entangled figures to bounce, twist and turn spastically, wholly unintentionally.

"Stay calm, Ethel," called Leona.

"She's all right. She'll be perfect by morning," said Oswald, "but, madam, will you

please remove yourself from my person?"

"He's got another person with him," said someone.

"I know he's got a woman hidden there somewhere, but he couldn't possibly have another person," said a friend.

"I think it's disgraceful. A girl can't ride a bus anymore without being subjected to scenes of this sort. It's sinful, I say."

"Lady, I'm not doing anything," explained Oswald. "Look, here are my hands." He held them up.

"He's not using any hands," said a passenger excitedly.

"He's bragging," said a woman.

"I can't stand show-offs," said a girl.

The bus stopped for a light and the large woman rolled off Oswald. She was helped to her feet.

"That's a very tiring experience," she said, "I wouldn't go through that again if you paid me. Here, let's get Ethel up."

They gave her a helpful tug.

A short blond fellow with a briefcase shouted to her. "Would you like to bring suit against this man, Miss?"

"Forget it," said Leona, brushing herself off, "he just

lost his head for a moment. What the hell, he's only human."

"Okay," said Briefcase, "but you're kicking away easy money. You could get that fiend for \$50,000."

Oswald got to his feet slowly. His head still seemed to gravitate. He looked at his hand. "I thought you ruined my ring whistle," he said to Leona who was still standing against him.

"What ring whistle?" she asked. "I didn't hear anything."

"This." He held up his ring. Then he blew into it softly. Leona smiled and leaped at him, throwing her arms tightly about him. They fell backward into the laps of three women.

"Look, he's starting in again," said a youthful observer.

"What a man, and you'd never know it to look at him."

By this time the driver, obviously nettled by the praise heaped upon the virility of a man much smaller than himself, pulled Leona away from her quarry.

"Enough of this carrying on," he said sternly. "The company don't allow outright friendships like that."

Oswald straightened his

tie and kept his ring hand safely in his pocket. The bus stopped at Elm and he got up quickly.

"Good-bye, Love," cried Leona.

"Take care, Sweetie Pie," sang out another feminine voice from the rear.

Oswald hit the pavement with a bound and kept right on running.

He opened the door, stepped lightly across the thick rug and peered into the foyer mirror to make sure his head was still there. It was, much to his surprise. He gazed at the ring. What a ring, he smiled. It was the best thing that ever happened to him. It made him feel like a new man. A younger, stronger, carefree man.

"Lambie, I'm home," he called loudly.

Lambie, in all her regal splendor, pounded into the room.

"What the devil happened to you? You look like a pile of dust. Didn't I tell you the Fresners were coming over? Go on upstairs and wash your face."

Oswald smiled confidently and sat down.

"Can't you hear me? Get yourself upstairs and wash."

In the manner of a man

about to perform a magical trick, Oswald raised his hand suddenly to show his ring.

"Yes, wash your hands too," Lambie shouted.

Dreamily, Oswald put the ring to his lips. He blew. The ring emitted its wail as it had before.

Lambie stopped dead in her tracks. Her mouth dropped open. Oswald blew again. Louder this time. Lambie stepped toward him and snatched at his hand. She yanked the ring off his finger.

She held it in her hands and looked at it momentarily. Then she tossed it viciously into the fireplace.

"What in the world is wrong with you? Are you losing your mind in your second childhood? Come home like a grinning fool and blow a ring in my face. Now go on upstairs and wash. The Fresners are coming over."

Oswald sank wearily down onto the lounge. So it had been an hallucination. It hadn't really happened. There hadn't been a ring. In a few minutes he would wake up.

He sat mulling the things over, remembering with warmth, the look in Janice Cradle's eyes—the happy re-

actions of his body during those interesting moments on the floor of the bus.

He sat bolt upright. Dream hell! That Ethel—and Leona. They'd been made of more than dream stuff!

Oswald smiled. Funny how the worth of what he has never really dawns on a man until it is beyond his reach. With Ethel and Leona tied in two gorgeous bow-knots around his person, the opportunities afforded now loomed as tremendous. He could have found out for himself exactly what a girl like Leona—Oswald blushed—how a lush dish like Ethel—

And I don't think they'd have minded!

The certainty of this thrilled Oswald! And just because of a cheap ring?

Of course not. Then what *had* happened. It was very simple. For the first time in his life, he'd whistled at a woman. The results had been instantaneous!

Oswald's smile deepened. Naturally Lambie hadn't responded. What wife *would* get excited over a whistle from her husband? But there were millions of other women in the world—

Oswald got briskly up and went to see about washing up for dinner.

THE END



A STRANGE LADY CALLED LUCK

By VILLIERS GERSON

Buck the odds and break the bank! Play the long shot and win the Big Rock Candy Mountain. It has been done. Here are some true cases of once-in-a-lifetime luck.

MOST professional gamblers wouldn't mind if Lady Fortune were a wench, harlot or shrew—they would not even mind if she were a vicar's wife-type, pouring tea in the shade of nodding elms. This isn't to say they are unimaginative types. Just the opposite. The gambler doesn't

believe in fairy tales—not because they're fanciful, but because they're *too prosaic* to hold his attention. Gamblers live in a world infinitely more strange than that of the Mad Hatter or Hansel and Gretel.

Gamblers are citizens of the land of probability, which is bounded by permutations

and coincidence on one side and on the other by the wheels of "if" and long lines of black cats and falling stars. For instance. . . .

Call him Smith (because that's not his name). He was a gambler in blue chips and wild cats who had backed his knowledge of the market with a million dollars he didn't quite have. A dip would wipe him out—homes, yachts, cars, the works. One morning he bowled into the city in a long, gleaming Lincoln, too involved with fiscal finagling to enjoy the splash of autumn colors in the trees and countryside. Too involved to keep his eyes and mind on the road. . . .

A rubber ball bounced out in front of his car, followed instantly and inevitably by a wirey, red-haired youngster in a yellow sweater and blue jeans. Smith woke up, but almost too late; he hit the brakes hard, and swung the car savagely into the shoulder of the road. He came to a jolting stop, missing the boy by inches.

The youngster was tearful. Soon his mother appeared from a nearby cottage, full of gratitude to Smith for his judgment and reflexes. The car was undamaged, but;

Smith's nervous system had taken quite a beating; he was shaking like a leaf. The boy's mother begged him to stop for a cup of coffee, to relax for a moment. In her home Smith's nerves steadied up in a few minutes. He drank a cup of excellent coffee, and was about to leave when the phone rang. The woman answered it, then looked curiously at Smith. "It's for you," she said.

"Impossible," Smith said, but he picked up the receiver.

The voice of his broker blasted into his ear. "Smitty, I'm glad I got you. Something



A million-to-one wrong number.

funny is hitting the market. It doesn't show in prices yet—it's just a feeling, a groundswell. But I'm scared. I want to sell you out—right this minute. Before anything breaks. Okay?"

Smith felt an eerie chill go down his back. "What number did you call to get me?" he asked slowly.

"Your home, of course. Where else? Look, can I act for you—right now?"

"I'm not home," Smith said, swallowing with a considerable difficulty. "You got a wrong number—where I happened to be."

"Quit clowning. The odds against that would be—hell, hundreds of millions to one."

Smith didn't quibble. He was a true citizen of the weird land of probability; his passport was faith. "Sell me out," he ordered. "Everything."

That date was October 26th, 1929. Within a week came the fateful break in the market that plunged values to disastrous lows, and destroyed a nation's economy.

How could you interest Smith in Jack and the Beanstalk after that?

Or take this:

London, 1814: Two gentlemen bet each other that wine

A STRANGE LADY CALLED LUCK



Getting rich the hard way.

is not more pernicious than water. They drank steadily one of water, the other wine, glass for glass, until the water drinker gave up with an aqueous gasp. The wine drinker won but the strangest part is still to come, for the water drinker took to his bed for weeks, confined there with—gout!!

Then there's the famous bet of Captain Barclay, the invincible English pedestrian, who bet he could walk a thousand miles in a thousand hours at the rate of a mile in each and every hour. At 3:15

a.m., on July 13, 1809, he won his bet in Newmarket—and one hundred thousand pounds changed hands, of which sixteen thousand pounds, the equivalent in today's money of \$80,000, had been bet by the doughty captain.

In the nineteenth century, a Colonel Thornton, who was simultaneously the best shot, the best swordsman, the best swimmer, the best boxer and the best horseman in England, bet—in the year 1800—that he could kill 400 head of game with 400 shots. He more than won his bet for he killed 417 partridges, pheasants, hares, snipes and woodcocks in 411 shots!

And what fairy tale could rival the story of a bet which created a dukedom? One day, as Charles II strolled across his gardens to the stables, he was hailed by his mistress, the enchanting actress Nell Gwynn. For some time she had plagued her royal lover to grant a station of life to their illegitimate son, and now, as the king stopped below her, and looked up at the second story window where she stood, Nell made the bet of her life. Holding her infant son out the window directly above the king, she called out, "Your Majesty, this is your

son. If he be not made a Duke this instant, I will drop him!"

She won her bet, for their son was made Baron Hedington and Earl of Burford, and subsequently created the Duke of St. Albans.

Less impulsive perhaps, but equally ingenious is the story of Jagers, the *real* "Man Who Broke the Bank at Monte Carlo." Jagers, a Yorkshire mechanic, knew something about the construction of the roulette wheels in the casino. The wheels were, and are, perfectly honest. The cylinder of each is made of sheet copper, balanced and strengthened by bands of steel. This revolves on its bed on a vertical pivot of case-hardened steel, the top of which has a cuplike hollow, into which oil is poured. Despite all care, however, wheels wear out—especially those in almost continual use. Jagers, after studying the wheels for months, engaged six assistants to record the winning numbers on each wheel in the casino. Examining the statistics, he discovered what he had merely suspected—that certain numbers appeared more frequently than others; that, in other words, the wheels had become "biased" through long usage.

Jaggers and his assistants then settled down to take the "invincible" casino for a ride. By the time the authorities realized that something was wrong, Jaggers had won 140,000 pounds and had literally broken the bank.

The Monte Carlo managers tried desperately to shake Jaggers by changing wheels from table to table, but Jaggers still managed to keep the casino in the role of a private golden goose. The authorities did win back 40,000 pounds but Jaggers, by painstaking observations, discovered minute marks on each wheel which allowed him to follow them from table to table. Soon he had won back the 40,000 pounds—and a few thousand pounds in addition.

Since Jaggers was within the letter, if not the meaning, of the law, the syndicate which ran the casino could do nothing but consult the wheels' manufacturers, who finally came up with the answer which defeated the Yorkshireman. The numbered receptacles in each wheel were made interchangeable, with the result that what had been number 20 one day, for instance, became number 3 the next; the effect was, of course, a new wheel each night. Against this maneuver

Jaggers was helpless, and so withdrew—some half million dollars to the good.

It was in the same casino that one of the classic true stories of roguery took place. A Polish count was approached by a man who surreptitiously asked him to step aside from his play for a moment. The newcomer whispered, "I have an understanding with the croupier at your table. The next time he takes snuff is the signal that the red will come up! Play 12,000 francs. When you win, give me 8,000, half of which will go to the croupier, four thousand for me—and the rest for you." The Polish count followed the stranger's orders to the letter. The next time the croupier took snuff, he bet 12,000 francs—and won. Delighted, he paid off the stranger, and told him to tell the croupier to repeat the maneuver—but the stranger refused. "It's too risky. Let's wait for tomorrow."

On the next day, the nobleman was at the tables as soon as the casino opened. When the croupier took snuff, he happily placed 12,000 francs on the red. But this time, he lost! When he discovered that the stranger was nowhere to be found, the furious count

confronted the croupier—only to find that the croupier knew nothing about the arrangement, that he took snuff because he liked it, not as a signal, and that the clever swindler had made up the whole story out of thin air—but had retired 8,000 francs to the good!

Even so well-run a casino as Monte Carlo can have a larcenous croupier, of course: One night a group of players at the trente-et-quarante table watched as the croupier dealt out the cards. One of the players seated next to the croupier had a fortune in gold coins before him. His neighbor suddenly started an argument over a trifle, and in the confusion the gold coins were knocked to the floor. Their owner shouted, "Let no one touch them but myself!" But the sight of gold coins rolling over the thick carpet had sent almost everyone to his knees to help the gambler retrieve his winnings.

The coins were collected, the grumbling gambler counted them, and the game was resumed. By the third hand, a number of men drifted in from all parts of the casino to join the play—and before the game was over, the casino had lost millions of francs!

This called for an investigation—and by the time the cards were found to be false, the winning players were over the border into France. Along with the croupier to whom a confederate had passed the false cards during the confusion created by the "quarrel" and the spilled gold coins.

But it doesn't take trickery or mathematical genius to make a winner. If Lady Luck smiles, you win—it's as simple as that. Consider what happened in a Paris gambling house. A young pastry cook without a sou went to the



A fortune for an orange.

tables simply to watch the play. He took two oranges with him as an economical lunch. A thirsty gambler, seeing the young man sucking an orange, asked him whether or not he had another. Getting an affirmative answer, he offered six sous for the orange. This was at a time when the sou was a fairly valuable coin.

The cook accepted, passed over the orange, and placed the sous on the biribi table where, at 100 to 1, he won six francs. Putting this to work on roulette, he won 200 francs. Switching to the trente-et-quarante table, he was even luckier and eventually wound up with some 500,000 francs, a fortune! He had to quit to go back to work for the dinner-hour rush. And he remained a rich man all his life—because he never gambled again.

Sometimes jesting Fate plays tragic tricks without fortunes. For instance, in the true story of Monsieur Labon. M. Labon entered the Nice, France gambling casino beaming with confidence. To-day was sure to be lucky—he felt it. He was not a well man, his doctor shook his head about his heart, his wife was ill-tempered, and the thou-

sand francs he had in his pocket was all he had in the world—but Labon felt elated. After months of bad luck, fortune was bound to change.

As Labon watched the little white ball rattle over the numbers, he knew he had to make up his mind; either he could nurse his thousand francs or he could recklessly place it all on one number. No sooner did he think of it than it was done—the thousand francs in counters slid forward onto number 17. As the white ball began to rattle about the spinning wheel, M. Labon stared at the number on which he had placed his last stake. If he lost—how to tell his wife? She would cry. He wanted to snatch the thousand francs back from the number. But he let it lie there, until the ball came to rest with a final clatter—in number 17! Labon had won 35,000 francs—a fortune.

He started. His face grew red, then pale. But when the croupier glanced questioning-ly at him, Labon made no move to remove his winnings. The croupier began again to spin the wheel—and once again number 17 came up. Despite the fact that he now possessed a fortune of one and a quarter million francs, Labon again made no move to

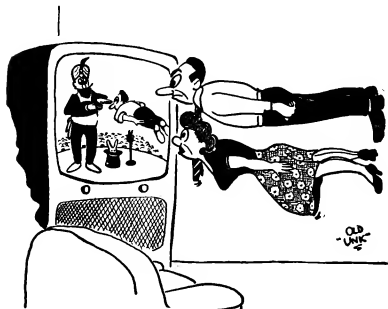
play it safe. Again he rode his luck.

The news of the coup spread over the casino. Soon Labon's table was surrounded by staring faces. The wheel whirled again—a roar went up from the crowd. In an event unparalleled in gambling history, number 17 had come up for the third time consecutively, and Monsieur Labon had broken the bank at the casino.

Under cover of the uproar, the manager pushed his way toward the imperturbable winner to announce that the

casino was closed—but never got there to deliver his message. An exciteable friend of Labon's had clapped him on the shoulder, crying, "Labon, you clever fox—you have won a fortune! You are a—!" and then had stopped in horror, as a strange and awful silence grew in the lavish casino. For Monsieur Labon, rich man and a favorite of Fortune, slipped from his chair, dead of a heart attack. Ever since his first victory, Monsieur Labon had played and won a fortune—as a corpse.

THE END



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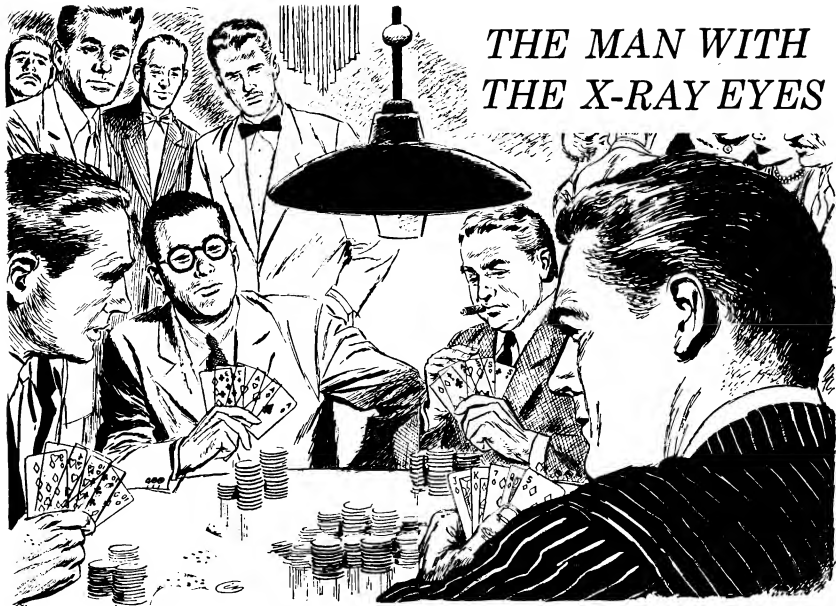


LEGS ON OLYMPUS

The girls on Olympus didn't have any more than those in

Atlantic City, but what they had was apparently more available.

THE MAN WITH THE X-RAY EYES



Contents:

- 3 = Mindfalls, . . . = essay by Paul Steiner
- 6 = Legs as Olympus = short story by Milton Lesser
[as by Adam Chase]
- 24 = Ways to Get a Gal = short story by P. G. Wodehouse
- 38 = The Devil Never Waits = short story by Randall Garrett
- 46 = Sex, Love and Mr. Bean [Excerpt from Asia in the Snowway]
= by Thorne Smith «Creator of Toppers»
- 57 = Time Get = short story by Milton Lesser
[as by Dennis John Stranger]
- 78 = The Man with X-Ray Eyes = novelette by Randall Garrett and
Robert Silverberg [as by Leonard G. Spencer]
- 103 = A Bucketful of Diamonds = short story by Harlan Ellison
- 115 = Oswald's Willing Wagon = short story by Bill Mageski
- 123 = A Strange Lady Called Luck = essay by Villiers Vernon

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